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MÉTIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: LOOKING FORWARD FROM WHERE WE STAND

A summary of themes, opportunities, best practices and issues related to Métis economic development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: POLICY REPORT ON MÉTIS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This policy Report summarises and assesses a series of ideas, initiatives, and projects that were presented at the *Calgary Symposium on Métis Economic Development*. The *Symposium*, held in December of 2009, and sponsored by the Government of Canada, was designed to bring a dedicated focus to the issue of Métis economic development, and set the stage for future work on this important topic. The intent was to capture how communities, government and the private sector are approaching this issue, and assess how best to move forward.

The material at the Symposium pointed to two overarching contexts that shape the policy and program responses to Métis economic development. The first is the income and employment gap between Métis and non-Aboriginal Canadians: there was consensus but also a sense of urgency that economic development is central to addressing this disparity. The second contextual feature is the assets and strengths that Métis contribute to this goal: Métis economic development is not just a problem to be solved but an opportunity to be seized.

The discussion that follows the contextual analysis is organized into three parts: a) key themes; b) opportunities and constraints; and c) 'practices that matter'. Key Themes that were identified in the discussions at the Symposium: the need for a Métis specific approach, the inter-relationship of economic, social and community, and a reluctance to rely solely on market mechanisms. These are discussed and assessed in the Report.

The opportunities and constraints section of the policy Report identifies the following:

- *Continued improvement in skills and knowledge for Métis individuals*
- *Continued improvement in business capacity*
- *Improvements in access to capital*
- *Partnership development*
- *Broadening the scope of Métis businesses*
- *Knowledge mobilization*

These are described and discussed in the report. As well, a number of best practices are set out and discussed in the Report. These include:

- *Taking a strategic approach*
- *Ensuring access to capital 1: Métis syndicated loans fund*
- *Ensuring access to capital 2: capital training*
- *Devolution of programs*
- *Build on social capital in communities*
- *Governance*
- *Embed training and skills development in cultural context*
- *Target youth*
- *Procurement training*

Finally, the Report concludes with a series of recommendations for future action by Métis communities, governments and private sector partners.

Introduction

This Report provides an overview and summary of themes, issues, and initiatives that are central to current discussions of economic development with Métis communities. The source for this Report's findings are taken from presentations and background materials presented at the *Métis Economic Development Symposium*, held in Calgary in December 2009, sponsored by the Government of Canada. The presentations at the 2009 *Symposium*, however, were themselves drawn from a wide range of consultations, research and dialogues about Métis economic development held in a variety of forums, and involving provincial governments, Métis communities, federal departments, and the private sector. Thus, this Report aims to give a sense of the 'state of the field' of economic development for Métis communities. The goal is enable Métis communities, governments, and the private sector to identify common opportunities to move forward on this important issue.

Background Context for Métis Economic Development

Historically, economic development has been central to the development of Métis communities. The origin of the Métis Nation within Canada is itself a story that can only be told with reference to the active participation of the Métis in the emerging economy of western Canada: not just the fur trade, but a whole host of other activities that were core to the economies of the various regions of Canada. As such, the relationship between Métis people and the wider economy is central to understanding the historic position of the Métis within the Canadian federation.

That tradition of an active engagement with the broader economy continues today. According to the Métis Nation of Ontario, Métis form the largest group of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in Canada: 48% of Aboriginal businesses are Métis even though Métis represent 33% of the total Aboriginal population. This fact helps us to recall that as *Otipemisiwak*, Métis have always been intent on securing opportunities to enhance the independence and prosperity of their communities, an intention that continues to shape the actions of Métis communities today. Economic development is thus an important dimension of contemporary Métis community life, and represents one of the significant contributions of the Métis to Canada. This is recognized by the active engagement of the federal government in Métis economic development, ranging from funding economic development officers in various provinces to supporting Métis involvement in major resource projects in Western Canada. These projects represent the shared commitment of Métis and governments to take advantage of the skills and independence of Métis peoples.

We also know, however, that despite this strong tradition of economic activity, Métis, like other Aboriginal people in Canada, still do not participate in the economy at the same level as non-Aboriginal Canadians. Métis levels of income are lower, labour force attachment is more uncertain, Métis people have lower levels of education and training, and Métis entrepreneurs remain absent from large parts of the economy. As with other Aboriginal people in Canada, Métis people face significant challenges in obtaining a place of equity and fairness in the economy. Numerous barriers face Métis people in their efforts to join the labour force and start businesses, barriers which limit the prosperity of Métis communities and their potential contribution to the federation.

These two factors – a long history of active participation in the economy, but an equally long history of struggle for inclusion and recognition – set the overall context for Métis economic development

activities. All of the discussions, strategy papers, and background research that informed the 2009 Calgary *Symposium* referenced this overarching context in some way or another, seeing it as motivating and guiding their work. The Government of Canada, for instance, clearly frames its Aboriginal economic development policy as a response to the income and employment gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. They are not alone in this: Métis organizations and their private sector partners share the concern to overcome this historical inequity. Clearly, the intent of engaging in economic development is to increase the participation of Métis in the labour force, create wealth in Métis communities, and provide a supportive environment for Métis entrepreneurial activity, so as to enable Métis people to enjoy a standard of living that is equal to non-Aboriginal Canadians.

But just as clearly, if the gap between Métis and other Canadians can be seen as a problem requiring a solution, it can also be seen as an opportunity. For Métis, but also for governments and the private sector, economic development represents a chance to take advantage of a major asset: the strength, diversity, and talent of Métis people and communities across Canada. Reading the papers and reviewing the presentations from the Calgary *Symposium*, a strong sense emerges that Métis communities represented, as one participant put it, a ‘value proposition’, such that investing in economic development activities simply made good business sense. This was reflected in the way in which many of the presentations, strategy papers, and program discussions were infused with a sense of cautious but real optimism about the possibilities for material improvements in the lives of Métis people. It was clear that most people believed that this was an issue where concrete progress was possible, and that with the right strategy and a commitment to cooperation and partnerships, things could be different. While challenges remain, the policy context is one characterized by a discernable degree of hopefulness.

This context then – of hope, but also a realistic assessment of the barriers to success - sets the policy and planning environment for actions taken at the local, regional, and national level to strengthen the economy in Métis communities. This shared context in turn helped to create a common awareness of the stakes involved in this project: equality and inclusion for the Métis, and a stronger Canadian economy.

Key Themes:

Within this larger context, a number of *key themes* emerged as people sought ways to give practical effect to the goals and aspirations of Métis communities. These themes shaped and organized the potential and actual policy and program responses available to governments, communities, and enterprises. In turn, these themes also shaped the terms under which people were able and willing to enter into partnerships with the private sector. These key themes emerging from the current dialogue on Métis economic development include the following:

Métis Specific Approach

Perhaps the clearest theme to emerge, and not just from Métis organizations, was the necessity to create, maintain and deepen a Métis-specific approach to economic development. In part, this was a very practical point: as a matter of effectiveness, the call for a Métis-specific approach was a recognition that program interventions will not be successful if they fail to account for the unique features of Métis communities: their history, the unique relationships to the federal and provincial governments, different

capacities and governing institutions, etc. This was a pragmatic point that attempts to intervene in programs are more likely to work if they are attuned to the needs and situations of participants.

But this insistence on a Métis specific approach was also, for the Métis presenters at least, a point of principle: Métis are a constitutionally recognized Aboriginal people, and as such should be considered on their own terms and not subsumed under approaches designed for First Nations, or Inuit, who face very different circumstances. This point recognises and respects that Métis communities intend to remain distinct communities, and want to participate in the economy on terms that allow Métis people to sustain and develop their communities, as Métis. So, for instance, participation in major natural resource projects such as mines or oil and gas development is welcome, and steps should be taken to ensure strong levels of Métis involvement. But these activities do not negate the fact many Métis people still hunt and trap as part of their culture, and that economic development needs to be balanced with the need to support and maintain the Métis way of life.

Inter-relationship of economic, social and community

A second theme to emerge from the 2009 Calgary *Symposium* and related materials was that economic development was intimately connected to other dimensions of life. For Métis communities, as with Aboriginal people in general, there is no sharp distinction between the spheres of the economic, the social, and the community. Rather, economic development is understood as part of a larger whole, with linkages and impacts in a range of dimensions, all of which needed to be considered. This theme was obvious in the multiple ways people described the purpose of economic development: to develop the community as a whole, to allow self-sufficiency for individuals; to enable Métis organizations to have independence from government; to strengthen the social fabric of Métis communities: all of these dimensions, and others, were considered to be at stake in economic development. Certainly, it was suggested in the research literature on Aboriginal economic development that Aboriginal entrepreneurs look to and account for broader community relations and dynamics in their business decisions, a point that applies to Métis people as well.

In one way, this is consistent with the Federal government's **Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development**, which directs Canada to take a 'whole of government approach' in its responses to Aboriginal communities. Recognizing the importance of linkages and the inter-relationships between programs, the Framework confirms that economic development should not be understood as the narrow responsibility of one department. So, too, for the Métis, who also understand economic development, not as an isolated domain, but as an activity located in the broader political, social and community contexts. As a result, the activities of governments, Métis organizations, and individual entrepreneurs are opportunities to meet larger Métis aspirations and goals, and conversely, social and community development are opportunities to strengthen the capacity and potential for economic development. While labour force and business development remain important goals, the presentations and background documents remind us that these two goals do not by themselves capture the broader understanding of economic development in Métis communities.

A reluctance to rely solely on market mechanisms:

One of the striking features of the material and presentations connected to the 2009 Calgary *Symposium* can be found, not in the *content* of the documents, but in their *authors*. A number of the presenters or authors were governments, political bodies, or other representative organizations. The research paper on Métis economic development commissioned by Canada gives us some hints, though, as to why this

is; it suggests to us that, by and large, Aboriginal communities are reluctant to rely solely on the market to produce the social and political outcomes community members are seeking. In part, this reflects the integrated and holistic nature of Métis thinking about the economic as a sphere of life, and that the involvement of leadership is required to ensure connections between these domains are not lost, or devalued, in the face of the tendency in western thought to divide and isolate. In part, though, it reflects an aspiration to a form of self-determination, expressed here as the reluctance of Métis communities to give up the job of steering their collective fates to the external forces of the market, with the result that community members exert pressure on their representatives to assume that steering role. Economic development is thus clearly a hybrid affair, as much the concern and domain of governing bodies as it is the arena of the entrepreneur or the individual. Policy and practice, then, should recognize this feature of economic development, and in fact it does, as governments and communities alike continually ascribe an important role to organizations that have a broader social or political role. Below, in the section dealing with best practices in economic development, we can see that there is in fact a right way and a wrong way to accomplish this objective: in particular, it is critical to clearly isolate business decisions from being shaped in unhappy ways by overt political calculations. This is supported in part by the well know work of the Harvard Project on Indian Economic Development, which stresses the important role played by good governance in American Indian Tribes that were successful in economic development. Despite the differences with Métis communities, who do not have the same legal authorities or land base of American Indian Tribes, the overall point is clear: there is a constructive role to be played by governing bodies in economic development. The government of Canada, for instance, recognizes this through supporting proactive initiatives with a number of Métis Nation governing bodies.

These three themes – a Métis specific approach, a broad understanding of economic development, and the important role of overarching institutions – both reflect and direct the activities and initiatives of governments and Métis communities, and their private sector partners, and give shape to the field of Métis economic development.

But the participants in the *Calgary Symposium* were practical people, concerned with making effective, measurable change in the here and now. So, to turn the discussion into concrete actions they took the themes discussed above, in combination with the contextual features and developed the following three strategies:

- a) *identify opportunities,*
- b) *assess constraints, challenges or limitations, and*
- c) *share best practices.*

Opportunities and Constraints:

Economic development, it is fair to say, is an opportunistic affair. Given the limited ability of even national governments to control the economy, much of what counts for strategy in the field amounts to identifying opportunities that might be emerging, and positioning people and enterprises to take advantage of these. And, as every entrepreneur knows, an approach that focuses only on problems, risks missing opportunities for change and growth. Métis economic development is no exception to

these rules, and so the presentations and background documents made frequent references to identifying and exploring *opportunities*: both in the market, but also within the field of economic development itself. The opportunities that have emerged as key in current discussions of economic development are summarized below. In many cases, these are the flip side of barriers or issues that challenge Métis communities. Where this is the case, these are also discussed. These opportunities and constraints include:

- *Continued improvement in the skills and knowledge of Métis individuals*
- *Continued improvement in business capacity*
- *Improvements in access to capital*
- *Partnership development*
- *Broaden the scope of Métis businesses*
- *Knowledge mobilization*

1. Continued improvement in skills and knowledge for Métis individuals

One of the central economic development strategies by federal and provincial governments over the last decade has been to invest in improving the skills and abilities of Canada's 'human resources', with the aim of enabling individuals to better attach themselves to the labour market or start and sustain a business. This strategy was in part shaped by the retreat of the state in the 1980's from active interventions in the marketplace, leaving skills development as one of the few remaining program interventions that could comply with the model of a limited role for government, but still be seen as a legitimate public policy response by citizens left behind by economic change.

Fortunately, this emphasis accords well with a serious issue in Métis communities: that Métis people have lower levels of formal education and training than other Canadians, and that this deficit holds the Métis back from achieving equity in employment and income. Given that this problem still remains, there seemed to be a near consensus that governments should continue to take the opportunity to fund and support Métis specific labour market training. The opportunity then is to essentially stay the course, with increased attention to the results and the evolving needs of communities, while building on the substantial investment to date made by the Government of Canada into this strategy.

One specific opportunity that was identified was the chance to include post-secondary education within the scope of federal government support: it was pointed out that Métis do not have access to the kind of funding afforded to Inuit and Status Indians for post-secondary education. Given the importance of post-secondary education to many professions, this is a crucial gap which should be addressed.

2. Continued improvement in business capacity

The provision of technical support to emerging and expanding Métis businesses was also seen as an ongoing opportunity to make concrete gains in levels of Métis participation in the economy. Currently, this work is done largely by business development centres, or where they exist, Aboriginal lending institutions. But this is surely too limited, given that much of the technical expertise involved in managing a business is drawn from private sector practices. Below, we discuss the potential that lies in partnerships within the private sector, including the potential benefits of sharing wealth, but also management skills and experience. With respect to this question of technical support, these kinds of partnerships are prime opportunities to transfer knowledge, skills and experience to Métis enterprises. This should supplement the existing programs in place to ensure Métis businesses have the tools they

need to be competitive and to operate effectively. For instance, the aftercare support provided through the Aboriginal Business Development Program, or the Business Mentorship Program, funded by Canada, with 17 Aboriginal communities (including Métis communities) in Saskatchewan: these are important programs, and there are real opportunities to build on their success.

3. Improvements in access to capital

A major issue identified by the participants at the Calgary *Symposium* was the lack of access to capital for Métis entrepreneurs, a problem shared with other Aboriginal communities. As has been discussed on numerous occasions, Aboriginal entrepreneurs often run small businesses with limited internal capital for expansion or growth, and most Aboriginal communities have limited capital from which community members can draw to finance their business. And, with the exception of the Métis settlements in Alberta there is limited ability for Métis to leverage a land base or use home ownership as collateral for this purpose. This is a long standing problem in Aboriginal economic development, and Métis communities are no exception.

But as was pointed out, this is a problem not just at the enterprise level, but also for the network of Aboriginal lending institutions. Aboriginal and Métis capital corporations have relatively small pools of capital to work with in their efforts to respond to Métis enterprises, have higher risk portfolios, and must also meet a community mandate, with the result that they have to charge higher rates and limit the size of their loans.

If the issue of under-capitalization is well recognised, so is the solution, which is to increase the capital pool for, in this case, Métis capital corporations. This suggestion has been put forward many times and was again discussed by participants in the 2009 Calgary *Symposium*.

What should be explored further, however, is what actions might be taken to maximize the effectiveness of existing processes for obtaining capital funds. Three of these are suggested below, two of which are discussed in more detail in the section on best practices:

- ❖ increase the skills and understanding of Métis entrepreneurs about how to access business funding, on the basis that this is a skill like any other that can be taught and improved;
- ❖ use partnerships to leverage the capital assets or reserves of non-Aboriginal firms, for instance by joint ventures on larger projects; and
- ❖ provide the opportunity for Aboriginal Capital Corporations to pool funds to share risk, and enable funding of larger projects that are too capital intensive for a single organization.

Part of the reason why this issue has been given so much attention is that access to adequate and affordable capital is an absolute requirement for real gains in the prosperity and wealth of Métis communities. Getting everything else right will have only a limited effect if this issue is not addressed.

4. Partnership development

One of the prime areas of potential growth for Métis economic development is to increase the range and number of partnerships between Métis enterprises and the private sector. This is embedded in the approach taken by the Government of Canada: their **Framework** places partnerships at the centre of an

effective Aboriginal economic development strategy. Partnerships, of course, are not new in Aboriginal economic development, but they are underutilized by Métis, in part because partnerships with the private sector are sometimes driven by the 'rights incentive'. Because Métis rights are less well defined by the courts, and where defined, are narrower than the inherent rights of First Nations or Inuit, this incentive has not been as powerful. The result is that private sector firms, particularly those involved in natural resource extraction, have not always seen the full value of a partnership with Métis communities.

As a consequence, there exists significant room for growth in encouraging and developing partnerships between the non-Aboriginal private sector and Métis enterprises or communities. Understood as an opportunity, this confirms the importance given to partnerships by a number of presenters at the *Calgary Symposium*.

Vesting the responsibility for this solely at the level of the enterprise, however, is problematic: most Métis businesses are small, and lack the management capacity to identify and complete more than a small number of such partnerships. In turn, many non-Aboriginal businesses are unfamiliar with Métis communities, and so also miss opportunities for collaboration, or fail to properly understand what assets Métis communities might bring to the partnership.

Accordingly, for this opportunity to be realized it makes sense to locate some capacity at the regional, provincial, or sectoral level to stimulate and support such partnerships, and help to maximize their value for both parties. This could well be a role played by the economic development Officers funded by Aboriginal Business Programs Canada. Such an approach would provide opportunities to build relationships between Métis and industry associations, particularly those that do not have a strong history of working with Métis communities. Note that the potential benefits of this strategy go beyond the strict exchange of business services. Rather, this should be considered part of a broader strategy to increase the social capital available to Métis community members; the research on Aboriginal economic development clearly shows that Aboriginal people are disadvantaged by their limited access to, familiarity with, and expertise in building bridges into the non-Aboriginal business world. Business partnerships are one way to accomplish this objective.

5. Broaden the scope of Métis businesses: beyond bobcats and graders

For historical, geographic, and other reasons Métis have met barriers in their attempts to involve themselves in the full spectrum of economic activities. As a result Métis businesses and individuals occupy a limited range of business sectors and occupations. Understood from a strategic perspective, however, this fact makes available an important potential gain: the opportunity to diversify the scope of Métis involvement in the economy. Done properly, this would not only open up new points of entry into the economy for Métis, but would also lessen the risk associated with downturns in any one sector.

Again, this issue has multiple dimensions, as diversification also serves Métis Capital Corporations. Like the communities they are mandated to serve, Métis Capital Corporations do not have a diversified portfolio, leaving them vulnerable as well to sectoral fluctuations. In the working world of capital corporations, their portfolios represent both success in supporting Métis people, but also a critical limitation: as one Métis representative put it, it is imperative to be able to get 'beyond trucks, graders, and bobcats' and assume a role in a wider range of economic activities. This is a sector issue, but also one of *scale*: the bulk of Métis businesses are small to medium enterprises, which is also where Métis

and other Aboriginal capital corporations are invested, meaning that neither the capital corporations nor Métis community members are directly benefiting from larger investment opportunities.

There is no simple solution to this problem. Rather, it may be that this issue is addressed by a combination of other strategies, whose collective impact is to broaden the range and scale of Métis economic activity. This does not mean that practical action is not available: on the contrary, there are a number of steps that could be taken to address this. For instance, one of the practices described below is to target Métis youth, who have a strong record of business start ups. One could easily see an opportunity here to engage with youth and help steer them into new and emerging areas of the economy.

6. Knowledge mobilization

If effective economic development is about strategy, then at some level it is about knowledge and its deployment. There is by now a substantial body of research and policy knowledge about Aboriginal economic development. But little of this research has been focused on the Métis. Because of this, we remain at a loss to explain how, for instance, Métis women ‘draw down’, or use organizational resources to identify business opportunities, or how early-stage Métis entrepreneurs use community networks to generate informal business supports. This underscores the importance of the work being done in Program Renovation, where stakeholders are assessing the impact and effectiveness of various business support programs. The engagement sessions associated with the Program Renovation could be usefully supplemented with knowledge creation and data analysis that brings analytic purchase and methodological rigor to the intuitions and experiences of participants.

This is not necessarily a call for more academic research, although there may be a role for this. Rather, it is a recognition that there is gain to be had in a dialogue between practitioners, researchers, and program managers about how best to use the tools available to Métis communities, and what results might be expected from any particular intervention. In other words, there is an opportunity in all this to sharpen our program and policy toolkit to more accurately and efficiently support Métis entrepreneurs in their work; that is, to apply intelligence to identifying how Métis people succeed (or fail) in their efforts to run their business.

Opportunities summarized:

Above, we identified a number of opportunities that were referenced or implied in the various economic development strategies, initiatives, and plans of governments and Métis communities. These, together with the contextual features mentioned at the outset helped give shape and substance to policy and program activities, both defining what is currently available to Métis communities, but also what might be envisioned as a next step in the evolution of the communities.

Some of these opportunities lie in the future. But some are clear enough that they are in part already being realized through some of the initiatives undertaken by Canada and the provinces, such as assisting the Métis Settlements in Alberta to provide business support to entrepreneurs, or working with Métis organizations to increase the availability of capital. These opportunities thus represent a practical chance to create change in Métis communities.

But these contextual features and opportunities present themselves in broad terms, and as such allow a wide range of possible avenues to achieve them. But since we know enough to know that some paths

will be more effective than others, one component of the dialogue about the field of Métis economic development is the discussion of *practices*: which ones work, which ones are feasible, and which ones should be abandoned. Below, some of the practices recommended by participants in the Calgary *Symposium* are described.

Practices That Matter

a) Taking a Strategic Approach

Earlier, this Report noted the interrelated nature of economic development, and that the field was not just confined to business firms or economic specialists, but also included governing bodies, community and regional organizations, and sector groups as important stakeholders. This both reflects and supports the theme that economic development is a *strategic* question, not just a business or tactical one. That is, Métis economic development as it is currently practiced and understood is necessarily concerned with broader implications and impacts, and involves a significant degree of interactions between groups with very different goals and priorities. These are inescapable features of Métis economic development and moreover, are features that Métis share in general with other Aboriginal peoples.

Because of these features, strategic planning becomes an important activity. Connecting organizations, identifying gaps, integrating initiatives, ensuring different programs support each other, avoiding overlaps, creating a supportive context for individuals or enterprises to succeed; these activities are vital to meeting the goals of economic development, and to ensuring that economic development activities do not have unintended consequences in other domains of community life.

Strategy then, becomes a form of best practice. This was clearly recognized by participants and contributors at the Calgary *Symposium*; most of the organizations have developed or are developing strategic plans and approaches to this issue, seeing that success will not come from simply focusing at the level of the individual person or the business enterprise. But not all strategic planning is equal; the presentations identified three necessary aspects for a good strategic planning process:

- ❖ *Draw on expertise*, particularly Métis people who have had success in the business world, or who have experience in economic development activities.
- ❖ *Balance the perspective of experts* with the views of community members, and use an engagement process to ensure that the outcomes of the process will be seen as legitimate by communities;
- ❖ *Make the planning process a two way street*: both draw ideas from the community and experts, but also use the process to identify opportunities that can be ‘pushed out’ to enterprises and community members for potential take up.

b) Ensuring Access to Capital 1: Métis Syndicated Loans fund

As we know, a lack of access to capital remains a major stumbling block to increased economic development for the Métis. As noted, the problem arises in part from the limited capitalization of Aboriginal (and Métis) Capital Corporations, which, because of their small pools of capital are unable to respond to larger investment opportunities.

One very promising proposal in this regard is the creation of a *Métis Syndicated Loan Fund*, which is in effect a trans-regional, shared access fund that can be used by the existing MCC's to fund larger cost projects (\$250,000 and up). It has the benefit of spreading risk over a larger capital pool, and has more flexibility in selecting the best projects for financing. As a funding tool, it addresses some of the capitalization issues facing the existing model of Aboriginal and Métis Capital Corporations. The Syndicated Fund also embodies the principles of coordination between regions and agencies, and can help to achieve the goal of diversifying the scale of Métis businesses. As such, it holds real promise for showing progress on a difficult issue that everyone agrees is a barrier to the development of Métis communities. It is encouraging that a number of Aboriginal capital corporations and the Government of Canada are in discussions on this item.

c) Ensuring Access to Capital 2: Capital training

A promising practice with respect to access to capital is to recognise that securing business funding is a skill like any other, and so can be taught. The underlying premise is that sometimes, the barrier is not the availability of capital but the process required to get it. To their credit, MCC's and ACC's have been good at helping clients navigate their system and secure a loan. But this does not address conventional financing, or issues such as leasing, which involve non-Aboriginal companies. A best practice in this regard is to provide capital market training to Métis entrepreneurs, to build capacity and skills within the Métis business community about accessing capital from mainstream financial institutions. Such a practice also has the added value of potentially building trust between Métis business people and capital market representatives, which may in turn stimulate access to private capital or to public/private capital partnerships.

d) Devolution of programs

Above, we noted the strong support for a 'distinction based approach' to government policy and services, that is, an approach that recognises the value of Métis specific strategies. Here, it is useful to reiterate the value of providing Métis organizations with capacity and decision making authority by suggesting that devolution of program responsibility is in fact a best practice. For the Métis it certainly is, for the reasons suggested in the 'Context' section of this Report. But it clearly aligns with the need to create economic development programs that are both accountable to the people they are intended to serve, and responsive to local business and labour market conditions, to say nothing of being compatible with the realities and traditions of Métis communities. The issue to manage, of course, is to identify when such devolution actually produces better outcomes for clients, and where it makes sense to take advantage of economy of scale, or the benefits of partnerships with other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations. Already, though, the example of labour market training has given us an example of this practice at work.

e) Build on social capital in communities

This particular best practice – building social capital - is well illustrated with an example of what, on the surface, looks like a relatively simple project; the creation of a searchable directory of Métis businesses, a project initiated by the Manitoba Métis Federation. Business directories are common enough, both at the regional and provincial level, although the Manitoba Métis Federation directory takes the idea to another level by making it searchable and electronic. As with other directories, the goal is to increase Métis business competitiveness by broadening awareness of opportunities for business collaboration; while also promoting Métis products and services.

But what this particular example points to is something larger, which is an awareness that social capital – the ability to create and then use social trust and cooperation – is a key asset for Métis businesses, but also a frequently missing ingredient in Métis business relations with the non-Aboriginal business sector. It is an asset because Aboriginal communities have well established protocols and systems for collective action; that is, they have social capital; and with a little work, these social relations can be used to support business development. Social capital is also a missing ingredient, in that it is often exactly this sense of trust, familiarity and cooperation that is missing between the Métis and non-Métis communities. In its own quiet way, an electronic business directory nicely sums up this issue, suggesting at least one way in which social capital can be generated both by bringing together Métis enterprises and identifying Métis enterprises as a collective, but also making those enterprises and their services available to non-Aboriginal business sector. It is these two steps, of building social capital within and without, that constitute the best practice.

f) Governance

It is by now conventional wisdom to suggest that Aboriginal community run businesses prosper only when they are freed of direct control from elected officials or other political leadership. Certainly, this is an old discussion in Métis communities, and this point is by now generally accepted. But it is worth reminding ourselves that this is easier said than done, in part because of the issue sketched out earlier: that Métis community member expect their governing bodies to exercise some steering and coordination functions, even as they expect them to keep overtly self-interested political calculations out of business decisions. This balancing act is not always easy to maintain, especially when the objective is strategic planning and coordination, rather than business operations as such. A suggested example of achieving this balance, at least from the perspective of institutional design, for Métis financial institutions can be taken from the Métis Capital Trust, which operates within the financial world as a legally distinct body from the Manitoba Métis Federation as the political body. The Trust has developed professional and innovative financial controls and record keeping systems that prevent abuses, improve performance monitoring, increase accountability and enhance the overall ability of the MMF leadership to make informed, knowledgeable and strategic decisions regarding assets and opportunities.

g) Embed training and skills development in cultural context

Typically, training and skills development for Métis individuals is provided in an educational or vocational setting, where students can focus on the specific curriculum they are expected to master, often for a specific accreditation, such as First Aid or a welding ticket. But while this works for some purposes, it misses the way in which Métis communities and their members still adopt a holistic and integrated perspective on economic activities. As well, such training is often technical in nature, and so does not often draw from or refer to Métis cultural teachings, meaning that it cannot take advantage of the resources of Métis heritage to support student learning and knowledge integration. A best practice in this regard is the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatchewan, which enables technical and academic training that is immersed deeply in a holistic Métis socio-cultural context, which enables students to marry technical and academic work with the traditions of the Métis. Here, training is provided in a strong cultural context, to ensure it does not become separated from the other dimensions of Métis life, including the traditions and practices of the Métis.

h) Target youth

Combing through surveys by Industry Canada, as one participant in the Calgary *Symposium* did, reveals an interesting statistic. According to an Aboriginal Business Survey, from Industry Canada, “Aboriginal youth are almost 2 ½ times more likely to be entrepreneurs than Canadian youth in general.” The Survey also reveals that at that time, youth entrepreneurs included a large number of young women, and traditional pursuits in primary industries and construction trades were prevalent.

In light of these statistics, a best practice would evidently be to target Métis youth with entrepreneurial training, as does the BEST program in British Columbia. And, it would sensible to combine this with the observation about the need to diversify Métis involvement in the economy, by ensuring such introductions to or training about the business world encouraged Métis youth to examine trades and businesses outside of those currently in use by Métis people. Entrepreneurial training: it’s not just for bobcats and graders anymore...

i) Procurement training

Aboriginal set asides or procurement policies have become common ways to leverage the resources of government or large corporations to assist Aboriginal enterprises to secure contracts. But the familiar problem arises, which is that bidding is a skill, and sometimes, for technical work in the natural resources sector, a complex one, and it is not a skill that is automatic. A promising practice in this regard is the procurement training offered by the Government of Manitoba. Through the ‘Aboriginal Procurement Initiative’, a series of workshops are available to help Métis businesses fully understand how to participate in public procurement processes. This is an important example of investment in human capacity development to assure the participation of small Métis businesses and entrepreneurs who may lack the capacity or expertise to successfully compete for procurement opportunities.

Summary of practices that matter:

The practices identified above are no doubt only a portion of the varied ways in which Métis organizations, governments, and the private sector are creating economic opportunities in Métis communities and with Métis entrepreneurs. While the practices discussed here cover a range of issues, they express a common thread: the need to think creatively and rigorously about what will work in Métis communities, and how to maximize in a practical way the value of the limited resources and time available to Métis people and those who have committed to work with the Métis in developing their capacity to become active in the economy.

Recalling the larger policy context in which these practices are set, we can also discern another thread woven throughout these practices: the importance of building on the strength of Métis communities as contributors to the Canadian economy whose full value has not been tapped.

Conclusion:

The 2009 Calgary *Symposium* on Métis economic development represented an important step in the project of enabling Métis communities to participate as equals in the Canadian economy. Behind the presentations, though, we can hear the results of dialogues that have in some cases been going on for many years, as Métis organizations, governments, and others work out their evolving relationships:

identifying common ground, establishing their domains of authority and expertise, and clarifying what role each will play in the shared project of Métis economic development. The current situation provides a number of opportunities for participants to take up in that project, and the experience of communities, governments and the private sector gives us good examples of practices that make a difference.

Niw_hk_m_kanak: All my relations



Recommendations

The following are some recommendations that would logically follow from and support the dialogues and background materials that arose from the 2009 Calgary *Symposium* on Métis Economic Development.

Continued improvement in skills and knowledge for Métis individuals

- Continue to provide human resource development through Métis delivery structures, but look for ways strengthen access to training, accreditation and post-secondary education. Given the importance of post-secondary education to effective participation in the economy, and the current education gap between Métis and non-Aboriginal people, this is particularly key.

Continued improvement in business capacity

- Develop a pilot project to determine how best to use partnerships between industry and Métis enterprises to build the technical skills of Métis entrepreneurs. While most business skills development currently comes from Aboriginal capital corporations or business development centres, the private sector has significant expertise that could be shared with Métis communities. This remains underutilized and efforts should be made to create better knowledge transfer between industry and Métis entrepreneurs and communities.
- Continue to provide business support services to Métis businesses (such as aftercare for loans), but identify ways to support Métis-specific services in regions where there is no Métis capital corporation. This may require some devolution of existing business development services.

Improvements in access to capital

- Continue the current discussions between the Government of Canada and the Métis capital corporations to develop a business case for a Métis Syndicated Loan Fund, and if the business case proves to be a positive one, identify ways to create the Fund. This would be a significant step towards resolving the issue of limited capital for Métis businesses, while at the same time allowing Métis lending institutions to diversify out of small businesses and into larger projects, under an arrangement where risk is shared.
- Assess the value of programs that develop skills in accessing conventional business financing, and consider ways to improve access to those lenders, and the awareness of major lenders about Métis communities. The goal would be to improve the fund raising skills of Métis entrepreneurs, as a way to ease the problem of the undercapitalization of Métis businesses and communities.

Partnership development

- Identify and initiate a pilot project that would build the relationship between one or more industry associations and a regional or provincial Métis organization, giving consideration to sectors with a limited history of working with the Métis. The goal here would be to strengthen the 'social capital' between Métis and non-Aboriginal business sectors, and build bridges that can be used by Métis for business development. This recommendation recognizes that this

'bridge building' should not rest solely on individual businesses, who may not have the capacity or opportunity to create these partnerships without external support.

- Identify and initiate a pilot project that addresses the value of building networks amongst Métis businesses, that is, that create internal social capital that can be used as a resource for Métis businesses. This may be particularly important for early stage entrepreneurs, or those who may face additional barriers such as youth or Métis women. An example of this is the creation of an 'Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce' where interest and size warrant, or alternatively 'business support circles' for Métis.

Broaden the scope of Métis businesses

- Encourage youth entrepreneurship training programs that assist youth to become involved in new and emerging business sectors. Aboriginal youth are much more likely to start a business, and actively encouraging them to pursue non-traditional areas of business could have a positive effect in diversifying the scope of Métis involvement in the economy, to help move it, as one person put it, 'beyond bobcats and graders'.
- A related recommendation is to examine closely the current model of skills development for entrepreneurs, to see if there are ways to provide technical support that integrate better with a cultural approach to learning, as does the Gabriel Dumont Institute, and on the other creates a clear path from the business idea to the start up of the actual business.

Knowledge mobilization

- Through a process involving practitioners, researchers and policy people, identify a strategic piece of knowledge, such as what social supports from the Métis community are used by Métis women entrepreneurs in starting a business; create that knowledge, and find ways to share it.
- Create a pilot project that examines in a rigorous way the roles and impacts played by overarching organizations, such as provincial or regional Métis governance bodies, on Métis economic development, and find ways to share the learning and analysis. This recommendation gets at the importance of strategy, and the role of Métis organizations in steering economic development activities.

Métis service delivery

- Assess what aspects of Aboriginal Business Canada's portfolio can feasibly be delivered by a Métis organization. This recommendation is derived from the recognition that devolved service delivery is a form of best practice: it also acknowledges the aspirations of the Métis to be responsible for their communities and for services to their communities.

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