ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FROM CANADA'S PROPOSED MACKENZIE GAS PIPELINE (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FROM CANADA’S PROPOSED MACKENZIE GAS PIPELINE

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Principal Topic

North American Indigenous groups and communities vary greatly in terms of willingness, readiness and approaches for entrepreneurship and economic development in the global economy (Wuttunee, 2004 & 2007; Cornell and Kalt, 1992 & 2003; Adamson and King, 2002; Peredo et al. 2004; Anderson et al, 2007). This case study examined Indigenous perspectives of sustainable entrepreneurship and economic development in relation to the proposed $16.2 billion 12,220-km Mackenzie Gas Pipeline which would connect the Mackenzie Delta to the Alberta Tar Sands. The route would cross traditional lands of four Northwest Territories (NWT) Indigenous groups: Inuvialuit, Gwich’in, Sahtu Dene & Deh Cho. Three had achieved self-government with ownership of lands and resources and funds for economic development; but with this came responsibility to protect the sustainability of their lands, resources, people, communities and environment. The fourth group was negotiating a land claim with the Canadian government.

Method

This case study is based on 32 structured interviews conducted in October 2006 with leaders in the NWT from Indigenous organizations, government, business, and communities. Additional information was gathered from public documents, media, and stakeholder websites. Visits to several NWT communities had allowed for participatory observation of the business and economic development, environment, geography and communities.

Results and Implications

Unlike in the 1970’s, the Indigenous groups in the NWT were ready (levels of readiness varied). However, they would participate on their own terms. Both collective and individual approaches were described. Extensive consultation was occurring with the pipeline proponents and governments. Several Indigenous groups had joined together and taken a shareholder position in the pipeline project. Many partnerships had been established with non-Indigenous companies to derive benefit. They also had embarked on education and training to grow their own enterprises and their people’s occupational skills. They had established regulations to enhance entrepreneurial participation and developed Indigenous business registries.

Indigenous entrepreneurship is an emerging field. This topic is relevant and timely as resources of many circumpolar regions are largely untapped and in the face of increasing world demand, more economic development projects are likely to occur.

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