

**First Nations
Economic Growth
and Employment**

**Youth Income
Assistance Toolkit**

Dollars and Sense

it's
our
time

The Assembly of First Nations' **Call to Action on Education** will have a direct impact on the capacity of First Nations communities to create sustainable economies that will directly employ First Nation peoples. Strong local economies and employment parity will result in contributing billions of dollars into the Canadian economy.

REAFFIRMING THE NEED FOR FIRST NATION ECONOMIC GROWTH

A number of significant reports identify economic development, labour force participation, investments and access to resources as processes that can relieve First Nation economic depression and circumstances of poverty, to the benefit of First Nations, their citizenry, and the country. It is generally acknowledged that the essential elements of successful economies include education as a base requirement.

Recent research by the Canadian Centre for the Study of Living Standards reported that investments in education for First Nations could add an additional \$72 billion to Canada's economy over the next ten years. In addition, the State of the First Nation Economy and Struggle to Make Poverty History report of 2009 noted that progress being made by communities is encouraging but the progress is especially vulnerable during recessions.

Article 20 (1): Indigenous Peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activity.

UNDRIP

Landmark documents like the 1996 RCAP report observed that "transforming Aboriginal economies from dependence to self-reliance will not be easy. The greatest boost for most Nations will come from access to a fair share of lands and resources." As of 2009, there were over 1,400 First Nation land claims in the system, with only 319 completely settled.

ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIPS

First Nations are pursuing a vision of sustainable economic and trade self-sufficiency achieved by ensuring investments in stable community infrastructure, opportunities for resource revenue options, human resources, First Nation-led economic programs, services and incentives, and effective economic partnerships. By being active participants in economic development, we can better ensure that First Nation economies thrive, creating wealth and jobs and supporting our people to have an active role in shaping the national economy. First Nations are taking a

leadership role as Indigenous peoples to balance development, opportunities for the green economy, conservation and environmental protection.

The path to prosperity and productivity continues to run through First Nations territories, the original stewards of the land. With increased legal recognition, and an unrelenting resilience, First Nations' re-emerging economic confidence helps shape First Nations' economies as well as positively impacting the Canadian economy. There is a new opportunity to foster the self-reliance of local economies for the long-term. First Nations insist on respect for the land, sustainability, economic policy that includes the future of First Nations, and a fair share of the benefits of development. First Nations must be full participants and drivers of new sustainable and responsible economic opportunity. The First Nations plan is a path forward supporting the prosperity for First Nations—and for Canada.

First Nations continue to assert and exercise their rights and responsibilities to natural resources within their lands. First Nations in Canada support economic development that respects First Nation rights and is environmentally responsible. Based on the principles and relationships set out in the Treaties and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, First Nations must be full partners in designing a way forward with industry.

In order to ensure self-sufficiency and the sustainable development of First Nation economies, First Nations are seeking a fair share of the wealth generated from their lands through resource revenue sharing. These arrangements, however, must reflect First Nations' inherent rights and Treaty relationships, as well as the principles outlined in the UNDRIP, such as free, prior and informed consent. Developing First Nation-economic diversity and mutually beneficial partnerships is seen as a key to unlocking new streams of revenue for sustainability in the future.

To support First Nations in pursuing economic growth and trade development opportunities, AFN has begun to examine potential for, and impacts related to, some trade relationships more closely, in addition to identifying the need to advocate consideration of First Nation interests in federal trade initiatives with other global economies. In order to support this work, the AFN has begun a review of trade initiatives that were undertaken by the federal government. AFN has also reviewed and taken an inventory of the different types of support that exist federally for the business community at-large; participated in a trade mission; examined opportunities for trade education; and outlined possible discussion topics for a national forum focused on First Nations' trade and commerce. AFN is also seeking First Nations communities and First Nations businesses assessments of trade arrangements with businesses from other parts of the world.

RELATIONSHIPS AND RESOURCES

Here are some examples of issues surrounding lands and resources.

The Algonquins of Ontario have made one of the largest claims in Canada, encompassing 8.9 million acres along the Ottawa and Mattawa River watersheds. An Agreement-in-Principle between the Algonquins, the Province of Ontario, and Canada states that the final settlement will “open doors for a healthy future for the entire area by providing new capital for regional development, new potential for cultural and tourism opportunities, and greater legal certainty for investors.”

First Nation communities are becoming increasingly involved in sectors like green energy, mining, forestry, agriculture, and gaming. All of these sectors require a skilled local workforce. The “Ring of Fire” in northern Ontario is expected to produce billions of dollars worth of minerals, from gold to chromium, which will provide economic benefits and employment for dozens of First Nation communities. The magnitude and diversity of skills will be critical. The Oji-Cree and Cree in the Ring of Fire, however, are adamant that the resources in the area will not be expropriated and exploited as they have been in the past. Resource development will occur only with full First Nations consultation and with free, prior and informed consent.

PLANNING WITH THE FIRST NATION WORK FORCE

Strategizing on ways to involve the First Nation labour force is essential. The AFN is reaching out to sector councils to work with First Nation employment and training experts to build training models and employment tools. An example of this initiative involves the Mining Industry Human Resource Sector Council (MiHR). A group of First Nation and industry experts are to produce a Ready to Work skills training program for First Nations people interested in the mining sector, to be tested in three pilot training sites in BC and Ontario.

Another example, involving the Railway Association of Canada, is focused on college conductor courses participation and training as track maintenance and signal operators. The railway industry, like many others in Canada, has an ageing workforce, and needs to replace over 10,000 employees within the next decade. Information about this initiative is available at its website www.yourlifeontrack.ca.

Both the mining and railway projects have been funded through the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund (ATSTIF).

From producing locally grown food to generating electricity, from owning and operating world

class casinos, resorts, and golf courses, to producing the next generation of trades people and professionals, First Nations have the potential to do so much more for their communities and Canada's economy.

The decisions for economic partnerships reinforce what First Nations have always held—we have a say and we will have a say—in any development in our traditional territories and the potential for economic benefits.

This is especially notable when we remember that Canada is largely a resource-based economy. Five hundred billion dollars of investment and activity is anticipated in the coming decade in resource activity that will take place in and around First Nations traditional territories. To be blunt, this development will not proceed without the full participation of First Nations. We exist. We have leverage and we must be dealt with upfront and honestly.

Our relationship with Canada has always included core economic aspects. Action is required in the economic interest of First Nations and all of Canada.

Three points chart the path ahead and outline the challenge before us:

1. Reconciliation will only be achieved when First Nations' right to self-determination is reconciled with Canada's assumed authority;
2. Reconciliation will only be achieved when First Nations receive a fair share of the economic benefits from our traditional territories and participate as partners in development;
3. Reconciliation will only be achieved when we can fully exercise and implement our inherent rights and responsibilities to our citizens and our lands.

More Canadians are now leaving the workforce than entering it, creating a demand for skilled and educated workers who can keep Canada productive and competitive while supporting the growing costs on health care and the social safety net. First Nations people, the youngest and fastest-growing segment of the population, are the solution. If they are educated and employed at the same level as other Canadians they will add hundreds of billions of dollars to the economy and save tens of billions in social spending related to poverty and poor health.

The power of our nations lies with our youth. They must be supported to be the change we seek. The other factor positioning First Nations as key players is the government's move to build a robust resource-based economy. Much of this activity will take place in and around First Nations traditional territories. First Nations are not anti-development but have shown that they can stop development. The so-called Prosperity Mine in British Columbia is one example. The success or failure of the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline will depend largely on the engagement of First Nations in and around the pipeline route. Attempts to push it through against the will of

it's our time...

First Nations are going to hit a wall of legal injunctions—a wall built on the firm foundation of constitutionally recognized aboriginal and treaty rights. This pattern could hold wherever First Nations feel excluded or that their lives, lands, or rights are threatened.

Government and industry must engage with First Nations throughout all stages of any proposed development based on the principle of free, prior and informed consent. This principle was at the heart of the original relationship between the Crown and First Nations, confirmed in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, and has been reaffirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was endorsed by Canada.

*Love is something you and I must have.
Without love our self-esteem weakens.
With it we are creative. With it we march tirelessly.
With it, and with it alone, we are able
to sacrifice for others.*
Chief Dan George

