3

Aboriginal Development:
The Process Is Critical to Success

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Introduction

With the resolution of outstanding claims and growing Aboriginal authority over their lands and resources, the potential for Aboriginal communities to grow economically is greater now than ever before. Anderson[1] notes that corporate-Aboriginal partnerships have increased enormously over the last ten years, primarily because business people believe that partnering with Aboriginal people will improve their long-term profitability. Concurrently, Aboriginal nations in Canada seem to be adopting an approach to economic development that includes business alliances among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and capacity building through education, institution building, and the acquisition of land and resources.[2] Within the Department of Indian Affairs, policy and practice increasingly emphasizes economic development and good governance—structural changes that can make important differences in the lives of Aboriginal people.

The process by which these structural changes are brought about can either undermine or develop the cohesiveness of the social systems they impact. Cohesiveness, or the ability of a community to deal effectively with collective problems, can make the difference in dealing with problems that inevitably arise in the course of development. The research reviewed in this chapter strongly suggests that the cohesiveness of the social system is essential to successful development.

Unfortunately, social cohesion is low in many Aboriginal communities. While factionalism is present in all political systems, the factionalism and distrust that exist in Aboriginal communities may be deeper given more than a century of colonization. In many communities, the introduction of Band Council elections by the Canadian government took power away from subgroups within the communities (e.g., women/men, youth/elders, different families) that, under traditional systems, had often had some form of built-in representation.[3] The Band Councils were not initially designed for self-

governance, but rather to administer the laws of the Canadian state. Greater authority and control has been acquired by Band Councils over time, but in a way that has sometimes created deep internal power struggles and a sense of ambivalence toward the Band Council system, which is neither well-designed nor culturally appropriate.[4]

Societies with similar resource endowments, labour capacity, capital, governance structures and governance procedures can have very different levels of economic performance. The process by which development takes place, and the impact this has on the cohesiveness of the social system, sets the foundation on which training and infusions of capital (the focus of much development literature)[5] make a lasting difference or not. Sustainable ends and means are inseparable.[6]

After reviewing some of the recent research on social capital and social cohesion, this chapter outlines the kind of process that is most likely to support long-term development, at least in part because of its ability to increase social cohesion. This process begins with a collective definition of cultural values that creates the possibility for building social cohesion in the context of personal, social and institutional empowerment, which provides the necessary base for economic and institutional development. Key principles of this process are that it be, (1) consistent with cultural values, (2) focussed initially on building working relationships across groups, and (3) actively inclusive.

Social Capital and Successful Development

A growing body of research suggests that the difference between successful and unsuccessful economic and political development is attributable to the "social capital" of that system. Social capital refers to the generalized trust embedded in informal networks and associations through which decision making and policy formation occur.[7] The term currently used to describe successful political development is "good governance." Good governance refers to characteristics such as democratic elections, stable laws, constitutional legitimacy, transparency, tolerance, public participation, absence of corruption, freedom of information, accountability regimes, administrative competence and independence of government from the judiciary and the media.[8] Good governance and social networks of trust and cooperation are thought to be so mutually reinforcing that the terms Government Social Capital and Civil Social Capital have emerged to refer to each.[9]

In general, the more people who are engaged together in a variety of civic associations—from singing groups to informal loan cooperatives—the higher the level of generalized trust and cooperative problem solving in the system[10] and the greater the strength and productivity of that community.[11]

Social networks of trust, in combination with accountable government and stable laws, are thought to contribute to economic development because they allow a more free-flowing exchange of information, reduce the uncertainty and inefficiency of transactions, and increase the incentives for producing wealth and creating jobs (rather than diverting wealth from others). Considerable research indicates that economic development, a well-developed governance infrastructure and greater levels of social capital tend to co-occur.[12] Engagement in civic associations also seems to lead to greater self-respect and facility in the skills necessary for democratic participation.[13]

A questionnaire study of eight northern Aboriginal communities explored the interconnections between social vitality, economic viability, and political efficacy.[14] Similar to social capital, social vitality refers to informal reciprocal relations through which community members share information and resolve problems. Similar to good governance, political efficacy refers to the extent to which the community has a commonly acceptable process for mobilizing power and distributing resources so that decisions can be made and initiatives collectively launched. Economic viability refers to the ability of a community to sustain the material needs of its members over the long term.

This study[15] found that social vitality was more important to supporting economic viability and political efficacy than vice versa. Economic viability decreased wherever development was initiated in a community that had low social vitality and/or low political efficacy. They also found that social vitality was the hardiest community characteristic of the three, as it could compensate for low economic viability and low political efficacy to some extent; however, economic and political strength could not compensate for low social vitality. Economic viability was found to be most fragile—once it was lost both social vitality and political efficacy were required to regain it.

Case studies in Aboriginal contexts concur that the ability of the community to solve collective problems through formal and informal networks and associations seems to be crucial to economic and political success. If community members are not effectively connected for decision making and collective problem solving, structural changes tend to "come apart behind them"[16] through lack of commitment or even because community members actively undermine initiatives. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reflected these concerns in concluding that rebuilding a sense of trust and connectedness is necessary for the successful growth of civil, economic and political institutions.[17]

The current governance system within Aboriginal communities puts considerable power and resources into the hands of the elected Grand Chief with few checks and balances. Within the "first past the post" electoral system, the candidate from the largest family can be consistently elected, giving that family the power to control resources and make decisions over time. This creates the conditions within which social vitality is frequently reduced. "A significant proportion of band members, then, feel shut out from political processes and reliant on this elite for any improvement in their social and economic well-being."[18] "Now that five, six, and perhaps seven generations have been subjected to the powers of extra-community exploitation, domination, and alienation, similar powers have taken root within their communities. Outsiders are no longer required for negative, demeaning, and dehumanizing treatment to occur."[19]

Outsiders can unknowingly exacerbate this disempowering situation by working *exclusively* with the "existing authority structure" as represented by the Band Council. Erasmus and Ensign[20] recommend that entry into a community *must be* through the Band Council, but this directive can be over-applied to mean that outsiders must work *only* with the Band Council. Of course, it can be just as destructive to successful development to be perceived as going around the Band Council—or to undermine that authority—as it is to marginalize other voices. What is required is a delicate process of respecting Band Council authority to make decisions on behalf of the community on the one hand, and of listening to and integrating diverse interests on the other hand. If outsiders do not take the opportunity to create and strengthen constructive social relations and networks, as detailed later in this chapter, "development can destroy social capital, setting off a vicious circle of social and economic decline."[21]

However, it is important to realize that not all forms of social capital support economic development. Social capital that extends beyond the immediate group, and exists in multiple overlapping social groupings with crosscutting ties, is more likely to support economic growth. When trust is restricted to a particular social group, the obligations to that group can limit participation in broader networks outside the group, which is important to continued economic growth. In addition, groups can place highly particularistic demands on group members: restricting innovation, individual expression and the belief in the possibility of advancement through individual effort.[22] Particularly when trust is restricted to immediate family or ethnic attachments, members can be discouraged from advancing economically, moving geographically and engaging in amicable dispute resolution with others outside the group.[23] Thus, any initiatives that contribute to the development of multiple overlapping networks of trust are also contributing to the potential long-term prosperity and success of these communities.

The Importance of Process

Social capital, which has also been called generalized or "working" trust, is clearly important. The process by which generalized trust is developed is less clear, but is likely central to whether social capital results in negative or positive effects. A broader concept, social cohesion, seems to encompass the means by which the positive forms of social capital are developed. Social cohesion describes the state of a community in which there is a sense of collective identity, equality of opportunity and inclusion, broad-based participation in decision making and a capacity to mediate rather than suppress conflict.[24] So in addition to identification and trust, social cohesion includes broad participation in finding solutions to conflict. Research finds that participating with others in a process of collective problem solving results in greater commitment and implementation of solutions developed than other forms of problem solving (e.g., in which an outside party makes the decision).[25]

The importance of process, in addition to good structures, is often overlooked. However, a brief reflection on one's own experiences with decision making indicates that the same outcome—depending upon how it is arrived at—can alienate, divide and anger us, or can connect, empower and reassure us.[26] This sense of procedural justice, the sense that one has had a voice and been treated respectfully, is so important that it has been found to predict our level of trust in our political representatives—independent of whether decisions are made in our favour or not.[27] For instance, the almost universally opposed White Paper (proposed in 1969 to terminate the *Indian Act*) may have been largely acceptable to Aboriginal people if it had been developed through a broad-based decision-making process with Aboriginal people.[28]

Procedural fairness is most important to maintaining support for leadership when new organizations are being created, or when there is strong dissatisfaction with the distribution of resources,[29] as is the case in Aboriginal communities today. In research on governments in transition around the world, Reilly and Reynolds[30] found that the uncertainty of the transition period is best countered by maximizing inclusiveness in decision making. Dukes[31] found that participating in community decision making results in an increased sense of connection with leadership and the practices of governance, a greater sense of meaning and community, and optimism about solving social problems. Without broad-based participation in decision making, communities can fragment and consume resources in contentious debate, or opposition goes underground only to resurface later in destructive ways.

Processes to Build Social Cohesion

Processes that involve people in a meaningful way in collective decision making increase social cohesion. To do this well may take considerable time depending on how well the issues are defined, prior experience of the parties with collaboration and the need to equalize power differences.[32] Investment in a good process within which people feel it is safe and desirable to participate is an investment in the social infrastructure of a system, and in developing the web of mutual obligation and interconnection that is integral to successful economic development.

The characteristics of a good process can vary considerably across contexts and cultures. The principles of a good process are more consistent when (1) grounded in cultural values; (2) working relationships are prioritized before making structural decisions; and (3) when actively inclusive through attention to all aspects of empowerment.

Consistent with Cultural Values

Aboriginal people in Canada are in a period of restoration, which involves relearning of historical Aboriginal traditions, animated by a set of foundational ideas. These ideas include: holism or the interconnectedness of things, sharing and collectivity, respect, life as a learning journey, and guidance from elders.[33]

Research indicates that institutions and initiatives in Aboriginal communities are more likely to succeed if Aboriginal people can identify with them. They are then perceived to be grounded in culturally relevant values. For instance, in my own questionnaire research, I found that the degree to which people perceived the elected Band Council to be culturally appropriate was a much stronger predictor of whether people supported the Council than the extent to which Band Council decision making was perceived as fair. People across this community said things like: "I agree with everything they [the Band Council] are doing, but don't do it in an illegitimate way" or "It's not an acceptable system, it's a combination and bastardization of the traditional system and elective system."[34]

In economic research on Native American reservations,[35] researchers coded communities for whether the structure, scope, source and location of authority in traditional government matched these characteristics in the current governmental system. They determined that there was a "cultural match" if they judged these four characteristics to be the same in both traditional and current government. Across sixty-seven American Indian reserves, holding constant variables such as human capital endowments, natural resource endowments, and marketplace opportunities, a "cultural match" was related to higher levels of employment and income.[36]

In an in-depth interview study, Aboriginal administrators indicated that they are often faced with an almost impossible task of balancing internal social and cultural needs with political demands.[37] For instance, if they acquire formal education (one of the most frequent suggestions for good governance) they are perceived to distance themselves from the cultural and local needs of their community, which delegitimizes them as local leaders. This kind of dilemma cannot be resolved by an individual leader alone. To resolve this and myriad other dilemmas faced by Aboriginal leaders requires collective decisions by community members. These collective decisions provide direction for leaders struggling to meet the demands of working effectively with outsiders while remaining legitimate in the eyes of their constituency.

In some communities, leadership initiatives can be effectively blocked by calling into question the Aboriginal identity of the initiators.[38] Given centuries of pressure to assimilate and considerable intermarriage, there are few "pure blood" Aboriginal people left. Hence, many Aboriginal people can become delegitimized by questioning whether their heritage is truly Aboriginal. Such attacks on their cultural identity can be quite painful. It is understandable that outsiders want to keep some distance from these internal issues. However, it is because of the central importance of unresolved identity conflicts and their ability to block successful change that outside partners would do well to offer support for resolving them. Outsiders, who do not have the same vulnerability, can make unique contributions to resolving these conflicts through initiating and supporting the development of working relationships within which collective decisions can be made.

In a study comparing two Aboriginal organizations, one that was successful and one that was unsuccessful at adopting Aboriginal traditions, Newhouse and Chapman[39] found that in the successful organization change began with a collective commitment to culturally appropriate principles (rather than structural change). This traditional code of principles was put on display, and in dialogue with each other, organization members proceeded to discover how to bring their behaviour into consonance with the code. Structural change never took place as the goal of becoming more traditional was met to the satisfaction of the members through this culturally grounded process.

Becoming culturally grounded does not necessarily require radical change. Slight cultural nuances can mean the difference between people's willingness to accept leadership[40] and their willingness to participate in a process.[41] Grounding in a set of values with which all can identify, and to which all have committed, provides clarity and safety within limits acceptable to all. The collective process of developing these limits together can be an important contribution to social cohesion, and, ultimately, successful development.

Prioritize Working Relationships

> You can have the most beautifully worded constitution, with the
> clearest recognition of the inherent right of self government, but if
> communities can't deal with themselves it's all for naught.[42]

Considerable research recommends a sequenced approach to structural
change in divided societies—first, relationship building, followed by
structural change. If relations between people and groups are hostile,
communication has broken down and trust is low. A process to improve
relationships is initially recommended before attempting to reach agreement
on concrete issues.[43] It is very difficult for people in such a situation to alter
their perspectives and behaviour patterns without the assistance of an outside
party.

Experimental research has contrasted two types of intervention: (1) an
outside party facilitates dialogue designed to improve communication and
understanding between disputants; and (2) an outside party focuses
interaction between disputants on reaching an agreement. When the outsider
facilitates dialogue to improve understanding, the disputant's perceptions of
both the chances for ultimate agreement and an improvement in the
relationship (e.g., increased trust) are significantly higher than when the
outsider focuses upon reaching agreement.[44] A process designed to arrive at
substantive agreements ideally takes place after, or at least concurrent with,
a facilitated process to develop working relationships—particularly if
relations between the parties are hostile.[45]

Aboriginal people often speak about the need to rebuild good working
relationships in their communities, to provide an appropriate climate to
rebuild the human foundations of self-government and negotiating or
mediating structural arrangements and constitutional change.[46] Ethical
guidelines for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)
prescribed that whenever possible conflict between interests within the
community should be identified and resolved in advance of commencing a
project.[47] How this was to be done was left unspecified. Summarizing
Aboriginal testimony to the RCAP, John O'Neil[48] noted that, although
theoretical models identify structural change as a necessary precondition to
change in people's lives, roundtable participants said that change occurs
through communicative action and a dialogic process among individuals,
communities and social institutions.

Susskind, McKearnan, and Thomas-Larmer have specified four
preconditions to consensus building. First, there must be a good third party
who can explain the process clearly to participants and then effectively
manage the process from beginning to end. Second, participants must commit
to consensus-building ground rules, preferably in writing. Third, sufficient
time is required to allow participants to shift from an adversarial mindset to

considering how to meet the needs of all parties. Finally, one needs a clear map of how to build consensus. Their map is detailed in the *Consensus Building Handbook.*[49]

Active Inclusivity

> We have always done consensus building. We call a community meeting for people to put in their two cents. If they don't speak up, that's their problem.[50]

The above quote from an elected Band Councillor illustrates a form of token consultation with community members rather than real sharing of decision-making power. The quote also illustrates a passive form of participation in which those with a stake in the decision are not assisted in effectively participating. This approach to development is fairly common—community members are simply invited to express their opinions.[51] Unfortunately, this approach does little to alter existing power relations, and thus development initiatives tend to reinforce the status quo. What is needed is real empowerment rather than token gestures and invitations to participate.[52] The ideal situation is one in which all stakeholders are committed to reaching consensus within a situation, and all have equal, respectful and complete opportunities to participate.[53]

People who have been shut out of decision making—who have experienced numerous broken promises, have been told for generations that they do not have the capability to understand or contribute, or feel very vulnerable to their leadership—require considerable support and reassurance before they will enter into dialogue. Formal processes and institutions, individual characteristics and social conditions are all crucial to the experience of real empowerment.[54] Formal empowerment, in which institutions provide mechanisms for real public influence, must combine with relevant individual skills and social norms that support participation. An empowering process engages people as co-participants and designers of their own change, particularly orchestrating the experience of empowerment among the "silent majority."[55]

Formal Empowerment

Formal institutional empowerment means that institutions and professionals are committed to sharing power; to entering into a decision-making process of mutual vulnerability in which no party has the ability to make unilateral decisions. This is very different from simply giving people a voice or access to speak to the decision-makers.[56] Giving people a voice has often been used by powerful groups as a way of manipulating, co-opting, or placating lower power groups.[57] In many Aboriginal communities, open community meetings

are generally considered a waste of time since most people do not attend and meetings may be dominated by an angry few. Authorities need to actively seek out those who do not attend meetings to understand their perspectives, create small decision-making groups of people who have not been involved before and ensure that the range of perspectives are integrated into decisions. Elected chiefs and corporate representatives who make a commitment to balanced representation on all committees from the various stakeholder groups (e.g., each clan) and set a high criterion for finalizing decisions (i.e., greater than majority rule), can make an enormous difference in the lives of underrepresented people.

Personal Empowerment

Even when people are formally empowered through inclusion on decision-making committees, they need a sense of personal competence and possibility, and the actual capacity to participate (e.g., knowledge, material resources, persuasive ability) before participation can result.[58] Material changes and capacity building are frequently required to change power dynamics within the community.[59] This might involve training in literacy, basic accounting, public speaking, or covering the expenses for people to both prepare for and attend meetings. The specific kind of capacity building that would support active participation by the "silent majority" is best determined in early private consultation with the individuals themselves, or perhaps through a community survey.[60]
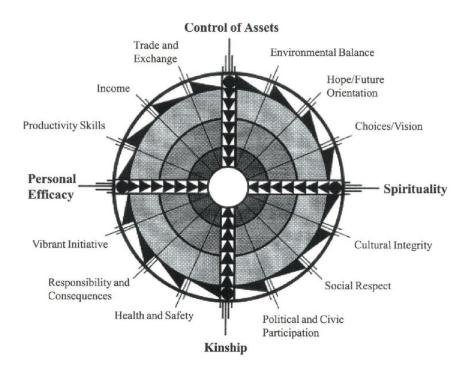
Social Empowerment

Finally, social conditions of mutual respect and honesty are important for an experience of true empowerment and ability to participate. While many Aboriginal people hold values of consensus building, respect and honesty, a self-protective atmosphere of distrust and cynicism frequently pre-dominates. Facilitating social norms that make it safe to express different opinions and to develop consensus on actions to be taken is crucial. Developing a sense of collective identification, shared vision, ownership and responsibility (as suggested above) may help to overcome the disrespect and distrust that prevent a sense of social empowerment.[61]

Putting It Together

The interdependence of cultural values, social cohesion, empowerment, economic development and self-government is illustrated in Figure 1.[62] The sixteen elements included in this model by the First Nations Development Institute (FNDI) have consistently been identified as important indicators of successful development for more than a decade of "working with tribes and Native people to change the economic environment of reservations to one that builds on local resources, recognizes Native knowledge and culture, and supports development from within."[63] Concentric circles indicate levels of development with the individual at the centre, followed by the group, then the community and finally the nation on the outside. While attention to these elements seems to occur spontaneously, the FNDI now uses this figure to assist community leaders and external parties in identifying and enhancing the elements that are less strong.

Figure 2 is adapted from the FNDI model. The labels for the quadrants of the wheel are renamed to correspond with the terminology used in this chapter: cultural values, social cohesion, empowerment, self-government and economic development. The research reviewed above suggests that these elements are mutually supporting, and, for any particular initiative, may best be pursued in sequential order starting from a collective definition of cultural values. The following example illustrates how an initial commitment to active inclusivity and consensus decision making clarified collective values and enhanced social cohesion and empowerment, which supported structural change.
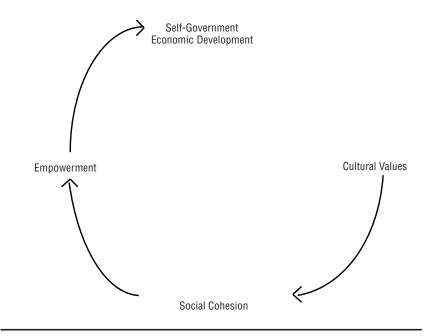
Figure 1:   The elements of development

Control of Assets

Trade and Exchange

Environmental Balance

Income

Hope/Future Orientation

Productivity Skills

Choices/Vision

Personal Efficacy

Spirituality

Vibrant Initiative

Cultural Integrity

Responsibility and Consequences

Social Respect

Health and Safety

Political and Civic Participation

Kinship

Individual
Project
Tribe
Nation

Ecology

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Figure 2:   The process to successful development

A Mohawk Example[64]

This community was very divided. Only 10 to 15 percent of eligible voters participated in Band Council elections, and there was no constructive involvement by the three traditional Longhouses in community decision making. Band Council initiatives were consistently criticized and delegitimized by the Longhouses because the Band Council was "not a Mohawk system." Divisions between the Longhouses were deeply antagonistic and personalized.

Because the various factions in the community initially refused to meet together, I actively sought out input from as many individuals within each group as possible. After several weeks of discussion on possible focuses for our work, members of all groups agreed to work on the question: "What are the barriers to designing and adopting a new structure of government in this community?"

Each faction contributed questions to be asked in interviews. These questions tended to ask for people's opinion about the technical design of a new system of government. Responses to these questions in interviews, however, frequently focused on the values that should underlie community

decision making: the need to embody Mohawk culture, to protect Mohawk culture and land, to treat everyone respectfully and for all relevant information to be openly communicated. Focus groups within each interest group also endorsed these values and emphasized the need for more trust, a greater sense of community and clarity about their cultural identity. To meet these needs, focus groups recommended that representatives of each group meet together for facilitated dialogue.

This intergroup dialogue most directly reflected the interdependence between developing better working relationships within the community and bringing about structural change. In the first few meetings the group focused on constructing a structural model for community self-government. However, when we arrived at a model with which all felt comfortable, group members immediately raised concerns about trust, cultural legitimacy and security. For instance, any cooperation with the traditional leaders raised fears of betrayal and a sense that, given their own internal divisions, the Longhouses could not really be trusted to act consistently with the traditional ideals. Any cooperation with the elected leaders raised fears that foreign processes would be introduced and that their cultural future would be jeopardized. So we focussed the dialogue on how the Longhouse and Band Council members of this group could model respectful interaction and constructive discussion of conflictual issues for the community. In the course of this discussion, people began to raise questions about their own abilities to engage constructively in the community and to consider the need for personal capacity building. By the last meeting several members had launched new projects for developing greater social vitality (e.g., pairing elders with youth, family conferencing).

At subsequent public meetings members of the group modelled respectful problem solving where insults and attacks had predominated before. For example, when community members responded aggressively to the speech of a member of a Longhouse that is considered to be "extremist," a member of our dialogue group (from a different faction) stood up and explained the valuable ideas that were embedded in the somewhat "extreme" speech.

Community members went on to organize many subsequent collaborative initiatives, such that now several acceptable models of government are before the community, most of which combine the elected Band Council and the Longhouse systems. In addition, the Band Council regularly undertakes extensive consultations with traditional people regarding negotiations with the federal government and other major decisions.[65] As one elected councillor said:

> We're trying to perfect the consultative process in the council, in that we take a personal interest in going to select individuals who are representative in the community and speaking to them and having sort of what you would call focus group sessions where

individuals are invited to come and review policies. . . . soliciting opinions on paper doesn't always work either. I think you just have to get there, sort of the same way you're doing with your research. I mean you have to get there and talk to people. . . . Everyone should have input, everyone who is affected by it.[66]

In this deeply divided Aboriginal community, participants welcomed the opportunity to develop a "working relationship" before beginning to discuss changes to the structure of government. They remarked: "We've never done it before. We always jump right into the nitty gritty, without clearing the air first. It may be lengthy but we have to address these issues" of distrust and destructive communication patterns. "That's just what we need. I was thinking about that. We always just jump right into a task, and get hung up on name calling, pointing fingers."[67]

A consultation service has emerged in the community and is frequently hired by the elected council to collect broad-based community input through focus groups, open community meetings, questionnaires, interviews, workshops and other methods. This private company takes care to educate people about the details of a policy before asking their opinion, actively reaching out to inform and involve people in decision making.

In 2000, the elected council made a formal declaration to return to traditional government and asked for volunteers to form a committee to identify the steps to this goal. This group includes traditional people, elected people and other community members.

Implications for Partnerships with Aboriginal Communities

Corporate or governmental partnerships with Aboriginal communities have similar opportunities to support a balanced approach to structural change. Corporate and governmental partners of Aboriginal communities can provide crucial support to Aboriginal leaders who want to ground structural change in mutually acceptable cultural values and actively inclusive processes that enhance personal, social and institutional empowerment. It can be very difficult for existing leaderships within Aboriginal communities to initiate this kind of process on their own when there are entrenched negative patterns of interaction. A professional facilitator helps to manage this delicate process, which allows all stakeholders to fully participate and to maintain a constructive atmosphere as they adjust to a new way of relating to each other.[68] External facilitation and support in time and resources can also generate the confidence necessary to enter this kind of process[69] and make it possible for a broad range of people to actively participate. In addition, if trusting, working relationships with external parties are formed the base

broadens within which social capital is developed, mitigating its potential negative effects. Over time, inclusive decision-making processes can be established in more permanent organizations, creating a vibrant civil sector to balance and support the economic and governmental sectors in Aboriginal communities.

Numerous sources document the success of broad-based collaborative decision-making in private industry,[70] national environmental efforts,[71] community disputes[72] and organizational settings.[73] In these examples, all parties that have a stake in the outcome of a decision can safely express their perspectives because there is an agreed-upon process for working with disagreements. When this kind of social cohesion is not present in Aboriginal communities, spending time up front to develop constructive working relationships is recommended before undertaking self-government or land claims negotiations and before making concrete decisions about economic development.

Conclusion

Development efforts in Aboriginal communities tend to focus on structural control and responding to technical needs. Clearly these are necessary considerations for economic success and self-government. However, an exclusive focus on structure and technical details neglects the importance of informal social relations, the quality of working relationships and the contributions these make to long-term development and self-determination. When outside parties partner with a community they have the opportunity to contribute to strengthening the social infrastructure, which in turn strengthens any structural initiatives. This does not mean a delay in structural changes, but a balanced investment of time and resources to create greater social cohesiveness, ideally before formal negotiations begin.

Endnotes

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2. R.B. Anderson and R.M. Bone, "First Nations Economic Development," *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* 1 (1): 13–34.

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