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More Research Needed!

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More Research Needed!

Abstract

We feel it is important to identify research areas that are understudied. Certainly, the impact of economic development on or near Indigenous lands is one such area.

In this issue, we have three feature articles that approach the issue of economic development in terms of policies, impacts, and benefits.

What is clear is that we need a much better understanding of the benefits and perils that come with development. We also need better cooperation between governments, corporations, and Indigenous communities in order to develop effective legislation and fair land use and resource agreements.

IIPJ wishes to encourage those who have studied development issues to submit their work. We will shortly be announcing our intent to create an international database of quality research across a wide range of important subjects. The purpose will be to create an ever expanding, open-access source of research. This database may also contain examples of agreements and rigorous assessments of the projects in order to advance our understanding of the challenges that come with economic development.

Keywords

economic development, resource development, policy, legislation, community consultation

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In this issue, we have articles that approach the issue of economic development in terms of policies, impacts, and benefits. **Wright and White** (see “Developing Oil and Gas”) take a look at the regulatory framework in Canada - how it developed and, specifically, the oil and gas regulations and policy. They conclude that we need more research on the whole policy and regulatory approach. As well, we need to come to a much better understanding of the benefits and perils that come with development.

At present, the agreements that are being developed and implemented around the globe are largely confidential because they are private agreements. In Canada, for example, the Impact and Benefit Agreements are between companies and Indigenous communities. It is difficult for people to learn from the past experience of others. It is difficult to know if the agreements are successfully implemented. It is difficult to determine if they are actually benefitting the communities. There are very few studies that use baseline data to measure the change that comes with development. Essentially, we have few to no methods available, and in use, that measure impacts and benefits. As the articles point out, we have a situation where even more simple guarantees of employment become difficult to implement and even harder to monitor. In addition, as **Ehrlich** (see “Culturally Sensitive Areas”) points out, more tangible and quantifiable impacts, such as changes in physical geography, are easier to assess than human impacts, such as those that affect culture and traditional lifestyles.

On the policy evaluation side, there are gaps in legislation that need to be explored. **Gardner, Tsuji, McCarthy, Whitelaw, and Tsuji’s** (see “The Far North Act”) analysis of the consultative process involved in legislating the Far North Act (2010) demonstrates the importance of meaningful consultation, negotiation, and accommodation in ensuring that the interests of Indigenous communities are adequately protected by laws. What is the role of governments regional or national in promoting fair agreements? For example, should the state be leveling the playing field to make sure that Indigenous groups have access to the expertise that would permit true partnerships? How can Indigenous Traditional Knowledge be incorporated into the process? How can that knowledge be protected? Can we ever ensure that Indigenous peoples are true equal partners in the environmental assessments, contracts, and impacts and benefits agreements?

Is it possible for corporations, with their capital and largely western worldview, to appreciate the position of Indigenous peoples? This problem exists if both come from the same country, but can become even more complex across national boundaries. Recently in Canada, Enbridge (an oil, gas, and pipeline company) representatives accused Indigenous Elders of attacking them and threatening the company before being seated to start talks. The Wet’suwet’en nation Elder had blown eagle feathers down on the Enbridge negotiator. To Wet’suwet’en people, the blowing of eagle down is symbolic of starting a peace process and it is respectful (Vanderklippe, 2012). This simple incident illustrates the complexity of inter-cultural respect.

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We feel it is important to identify research areas that are understudied. Certainly, the impact of economic development on or near Indigenous lands is one such area. We know there are many projects underway across the globe. An example is a project underway that combines both basic research and policy development. The Institute of Economics and Industrial Engineering (Novosibirsk), the Siberian Scientific Analytical Center (Tyumen), and the Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium (International) at Western University, Canada aim to develop advanced forms of cooperation between oil and gas companies and Indigenous People of the North of Russia. Local Indigenous peoples will be partners in this project. The project aims to develop a regulatory and policy framework that will ensure benefits for the Russian Indigenous peoples of the region. The resulting model could be generalized.

Projects like this are going to be helpful in understanding the issues and complexities, but there needs to be a lot more research work done across many locations.

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