

CONCLUSIONS

Keeping the Agenda Alive

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Delegates deemed the Value(s) Added Conference such a success, the quality of the presentations so high — one student participant judged the conference “a life-changing experience” — that they asked organizers to build on the success by making the findings widely accessible and by organizing future conferences. In addition to publishing this special issue of the *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, we are planning with colleagues in Latin America and the Pacific Islands a 2005 conference on Indigenous Women’s Development.

Thus, delegates wanted to keep the agenda alive, to keep adding values to current debate, making up for the deficits in public discourse, understanding, and education in multiple ways and in multiple sites. And delegates gave much food for thought in their own deliberations in talking circles and in a final agenda-setting day. They were clear that the task facing those working in Aboriginal CED can be a daunting one, but that it can be made easier by unmasking and multitasking. Unmasking the costs of colonialism and getting beyond shame and blame and multitasking because there is no single remedy, just as there is no single meaning for “traditional values”, no single map of the past that can be made to achieve a just, prosperous, and secure future for Aboriginal peoples. And there are rich resources (in RCAP, treaties, and the Constitution, for example) and immense community potential to dream, create, and celebrate together. In all of this education (of the sort commended by Marie Battiste) is vital.

There remains a need to rediscover traditional economies while developing treaty, knowledge, and other economies, as Sakej Henderson suggested. We are not helpless, participants stressed, in the face of mysterious natural forces but can creatively reshape what cultures and discourse shaped in the first place. Things are not just the way they are, but can be changed by changing whose and which stories are heard. Delegates were equally clear that we are limited only by our imaginations, and that CED projects can only be successfully developed when values are discussed and integrated from the beginning, when partnerships displace paternalism, and when community participation is strengthened and made more meaningful.

Like Wanda Wuttunee and other speakers, they stressed a foundation of Aboriginal world views, spirituality, land, and languages and the importance of a focus on the long term and the big picture, on the seven generations rather than short-term survival, as well as the need to ground theory in practice and values and to ground practice and planning in holistic theory. Only then could CED planning and practice arbitrate the claims of culture, the needs of business, and

the interests of communities and the environment. If there was commitment to keeping politics and business separate, there was also a recognition that we need to be ready for their convergence at regular intervals to complicate and broaden notions of economic value. Perhaps too, we need to have the sort of critical dialogue David Newhouse recommended on the meanings of politics and the variety of practices politics may include.

Delegates reinforced some other key themes in recommending these strategies in rethinking Aboriginal CED:

- involving the Elders and the youth
- revaluing diversity, while uncovering commonalities we share
- decolonizing thinking and promoting respect and reciprocity, co-operation and collaboration
- honouring urban and rural communities
- building institutions to promote ethical development
- turning community assets into active capital

Within this broad framework, participants aimed to chart and rechart the course for Aboriginal CED in the 21st century. In particular, they came to consensus on these priorities:

- to enhance choices and promote change through education
- to bridge the generational gap within communities
- to underline the possible and break down unproductive barriers
- to develop multiple strategies for multiple audiences
- to develop culturally appropriate policies and protocols

Keeping the agenda alive and enhancing a new Aboriginal CED culture, they agreed, means interdisciplinary and cross-cultural co-operation; sharing voices and networking; rediscovering traditional economies while developing treaty, knowledge, and other economies. It means restructuring and rethinking Canada and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations, rewriting discourses and curricula to remake meanings and relationships, and re-imagining big stories that nourish local realities. And so the conference concluded with a postcolonial hope and determination to dream, create, and celebrate together again — this time in a conference around Indigenous women's CED, particularly grassroots and "flaxroots" women and the academics who have worked with them.

The purpose of the planned follow-up conference is threefold:

1. To provide an opportunity for exchange on culture, themes, and projects — especially "best practices" — relevant to Indigenous women's community development (recognizing the broad range of experiences within and among the three regions);
2. To begin a process of working together to build alliances for mutual assistance in sustainable development;
3. To commit to specific action plans and outcomes for the next three years.

The organization of the conference attempts to reflect a holistic view of community development in a wide range of settings rather than being built on specific themes. Nevertheless, we anticipate that the following specific themes will figure prominently in our presentations and action planning: health, education, rights, language and culture, gender, work/family/community, urbanization, information and communication technologies, credit, business training, mentoring, and networking. In these ways, we aim to keep the agenda alive and enhance a new Aboriginal CED culture in the making.