

#7 Resource Development and Wellbeing in Northern Canada: Myth or Opportunity by Brenda Parlee, University of Alberta

“Wellbeing” is a good way to talk about important environmental, cultural, social, economic and health issues in northern communities. Finding ways to improve wellbeing is a key area in the review of resource developments and how these affect northern people. Resource development can bring many benefits, but can also be harmful for communities and the environment. Rapid development can cause many changes to communities. Many people want to know: “Can resource development improve wellbeing of northern communities”?



Areas that need further study:

⇒ *Education: Knowledge and Wellbeing*

Education affects people’s health and wellbeing. Government education programs for Indigenous peoples had many negative effects that are still felt today. Education programs do not always meet the needs of northern students. They must be based on local culture and traditional knowledge. Training provided by industry may be positive for communities hoping for employment. However, communities still need other trained people, such as youth workers.

⇒ *Wellbeing: Buildings and Roads*

Housing, health care, and schools add to a community’s wellbeing. In much of northern Canada these need to be improved, and housing shortages are a big problem. There are many ideas about how community-government-industry can work together to meet housing needs. Policy changes are needed to make sure solutions are possible.

⇒ *Land and Wellbeing*

Indigenous communities have strong emotional, social, economic and cultural ties to the land and resources of the arctic. Resource development can cause many stresses for community wellbeing because it has social, financial and environmental effects. Government and industry often only focus on one issue or part. Finding ways to deal with all of the effects of development together is important.

⇒ *Culture and Wellbeing*

Cultural practices help protect wellbeing in Indigenous communities. Those with strong cultural roots tend to have fewer issues of addiction and social illness. In cases of resource development projects, elders and other community members may be more confident about the future wellbeing of their communities when Traditional Knowledge is included in decisions about the management and monitoring.

⇒ *Social Relations and Social Economies*

Resource development can bring many kinds of economic benefits to northern communities such as employment but there are also barriers. For example, communities who have fewer students finishing high school tend to have fewer and lower paying jobs. Many large mining, hydro and oil and gas projects last only a few years and give high incomes followed by no incomes (boom and bust). Strong social relationships, such as good family support, can help make it easier for communities to live with the effects of a “bust” period.

⇒ *Self-Determination, Human Security, and Wellbeing*

In the past Indigenous communities had strong systems of governance to keep their communities, lands and resources healthy and maintained for many generations. Government methods to control northern communities, such as wildlife management and residential school programs, were damaging. Land claims, devolution and groups such as the Arctic Council, have helped many northern communities get control over their lives, health, education and lands and resources. This improves wellbeing in different ways and gives hope for youth in the north’s future.



Spiritual and cultural connection to the land is important for indigenous peoples, so when resource development makes changes to the environment people’s wellbeing is affected.

