

Social Innovation for Sustainability in Arctic Resource Development (SISARD): Summary

Despite recent commodity price decreases, Northern communities continue to face pressures from industry and governments related to the development of northern resources. In the past, there have been few sustainable benefits to these communities from extractive projects and often these projects have left a legacy of negative impacts. These increased pressures come at a time when these communities are faced with a range of challenges that threaten their long-term sustainability and well-being. Recent research has provided these communities with knowledge and tools for understanding and dealing with both positive and negative aspects of extractive industry development (ReSDA publications). At the same time, there is a need for research to show how best to translate the short-term benefits of extractive resource development into long-term sustainable futures. It is clear from our research across the circumpolar north, that the boom and bust patterns associated with extractive resource projects do not provide the kinds of lasting contributions to community well-being, economic security and environmental health that is often promised during the promotion and planning of major resource extraction projects. While communities can and do get benefits from resource extraction projects, alternatives are needed to ensure sustainable economic development.

This project builds on the growing body of social science and humanities research dealing with extractive industry impacts in the Arctic by focusing on how communities can best ensure that any short-term benefits of extractive resource development can be transformed into long-term sustainable activities. It builds on the successes of our existing network of partners and academics created around the theme of the northern social economy (SERNNNoCa 2006-2011) and which later focused on extractive resource development (ReSDA 2011 – 2018). These networks produced a large number of academic publications as well as practical outcomes and networking opportunities for northerners. Although much was learned from this work, there are many more issues of social, economic, cultural and environmental significance that require research. Our northern partners still struggle with many complex questions about the sustainability of their communities and economies.

The proposed project would address these gaps and questions through the lens of social innovation. For our purposes, social innovation is seen as a process of developing new social practices to better meet human needs that are currently being unmet with an emphasis on empowering communities. It is an extension of terms such as social economy and social enterprise. Recent research has pointed to the usefulness of this concept for regional and community development.

Over the past year, the research team has met with territorial and regional Aboriginal governments, concerned communities and research institutes and colleges in northern Canada. These partners, along with many researchers in a range of disciplines, have developed a series of research questions which fall along four (4) main challenge areas: managing impacts on northern communities; food security, subsistence, and culture; enhancing community well-being; and building capacity and diversifying the economy.

The following lists the central research questions for each subproject. Each project will be done in partnership with a northern community-based organization who will assist in the development, execution, validation of the research and assist in knowledge sharing. These projects are interdisciplinary and involve a range of research methods. The projects will help build capacity in northern communities by training community researchers and promoting the participation of students from northern communities. We will work with our government partners to help us use research results to inform policy development and we will use our educational partners to enhance curriculum materials based on this research. Knowledge sharing with communities will be given a high priority and we will use a variety of knowledge sharing tools developed with partners during the SERNNNoCa and ReSDA research projects.

Focus: How to use social innovation to transform the short-term benefits of extractive resource development into long-term renewable development

Managing Impacts on Northern Communities

1. What are the major problems communities and organizations in the north currently face regarding the assessment of social impacts? How do communities feel about their current role? What are the best cases?
2. What are the impacts of extractives on health and what are the best examples of mitigating negative impacts and accentuating positive impacts?
3. How can we improve the indicators we use to monitor well-being and resource development impacts? How can communities collect, control and use this information?
4. How can we better integrate concerns shared by women into assessments and understanding impacts and resource decision-making? These include impacts on poverty, sharing, and food security.
5. Governance structures in the North – land claim agreements and self-government – how does this provide greater control / ownership in the resource sector. What are examples of effective negotiations and models for managing developments.

Food security, Subsistence Activities, and Culture

6. How can we best monitor the barriers to subsistence activities and use this monitoring to determine the best examples of resource extractive developments being used to enhance subsistence activities?
7. What are the best examples of food security and food distribution being enhanced by extractive resource development and what are the best ways for subsistence foods to be distributed to communities experiencing extractive development? How does the value chain of northern food production operate and how can it be adapted to benefit community economic development and help alleviate conditions of northern food insecurity?
8. How can we use the short-term benefits of extractive resource development to enhance the development of more culturally appropriate and more sustainable economic activities? What is the existing and potential for non-renewable resources development in the north (production capacity, by region, product, and market potential)?

Enhancing community well-being

9. How do northern communities define, measure and track the impacts of development on the well-being of their communities?
10. What are best practices for linking Indigenous knowledge (local and traditional knowledge) and management practices into decision-making about resource development? How can IQ and TEK be used to inform the development of renewable resource economies in the north?
11. What are the best ways for communities to distribute revenues from resource development? (Rodon)
12. What are the best models of community sovereign wealth funds for communities to use?
13. Creative/Innovative approaches to fostering community well-being when facing the boom and bust cycles of resource developments.

Building capacity and diversifying the economy

14. What are the best examples of training programs for long-term sustainability?
15. What are the best arrangements for work/life balance in FIFO arrangements for northern workers?
16. What are the impacts of extractive development on mobility of northern communities? Do they increase or decrease mobility?
17. How can extractives support business development that can then be used for renewable development? What is the current state of northern entrepreneurial capacity and what existing/new skills can be used to develop renewable resource development opportunities?

18. What are the best examples of communities dealing with resource bust periods and the closure of extractive activities?
19. What are the best employment arrangements?
20. Are IBAs working? Do they improve the situation or perpetuate past problems? How can you ensure communities can contribute adequately to the negotiation of IBAs?
21. How can remediation activities be best used to support the long-term sustainability of northern communities?
22. How can existing and future infrastructure relating to resource development be best used to support the long-term sustainability of northern communities?
23. How can we improve models, such as the staple model, to better understand where resource development leakages are occurring and where linkages could occur?