

Some Thoughts on Rural Development and Indigenous People

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Context

- A number of OECD members have significant numbers of first nations – indigenous people, including: Australia, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United States.
- What distinguishes indigenous people from other minority groups, and the majority population, is their distinct society that has specific rights and values reflecting their status as original inhabitants. And in many cases they exist as a separate nation on a distinct territory within the country.
- Unlike other minorities indigenous people are typically not considered to be distinct or visible minorities so they exist outside the usual framework that establishes rights.

Context

- Indigenous people are a minor share of national populations but a majority in some rural regions and a large minority in some provinces/states.
- Mainly populations are clustered in remote rural regions, but significant numbers can be found in some urban centers.
- While the share of indigenous people living in urban areas is increasing most countries have not identified a policy to deal with indigenous people in an urban area.

Canadian Context

- Federal government has primary responsibility for dealing with first nations, but provinces have primary responsibility for resource management and land use.
- As you move from east to west in Canada the clarity of treaties diminishes – in B.C. many bands lack a treaty.
- Recent court rulings have held that bands have control over crown lands that are outside reserves and that title on other lands has been impaired by government failure to meet treaty obligations.

Development Challenge

- On reserves the rural development challenge is similar to, but typically far bigger, than in other rural communities
 - In most countries, most indigenous populations have significantly lower: incomes, employment rates, health status, life-spans and education levels than other groups.
 - While indigenous populations may have specific rights, they are also highly dependent on national governments for funding.
 - Because population growth exceeds the ability of the local economy to provide employment there is pressure for youth to leave,
 - A combination of collective property rights and poor access to finance constrains development.
- Until recently most countries imposed strong national oversight of indigenous populations and attempted to directly manage social and economic relations.

Emerging Issues

- Arctic development – Global warming will open up the arctic, but this will almost certainly result in conflicts between indigenous populations (supported by global environmental groups) and those seeking access to resources.
- In some rural regions only indigenous people have positive rates of population increase, which will in some cases lead to majority indigenous populations.
- Resource Development – new technologies are creating new resource conflicts between majority and indigenous populations.
 - refusal of tribes in Western Canada to allow pipelines for oil and natural gas to cross their territory
 - conflicts over fracking pipeline siting in areas where tribal lands exist in the United States
 - conflicts over fisheries management and water rights in the Western US
 - unsettled or contested land claims in multiple countries