

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

People Taking Charge of their own Economic Destinies

by Terri Proulx, Seed Winnipeg Inc.

Sustainable development is part of what Community Economic Development or CED, attempts to achieve. It is a holistic approach that is a proven model time and time again. It means groundwork level action that vibrates up, instead of a top-down approach. People taking charge of their own economic destinies in a socially inclusive manner has huge economic implications affecting the entire community or Winnipeg as a whole.

If we broaden our tax base to include those who are currently excluded, we enrich all businesses as fresh spending and more economic activity spur growth in all sectors.

A perfect example of CED is Local Investment Toward Employment (LITE). LITE started because a credit union employee saw a flawed system to outright charity. Neechi Foods is a worker owned cooperative grocery store in the heart of the Inner city. This store refused to move to a more prominent location because if it did, the residents would have to travel far to find another grocery store. Most of the residents near Lord Selkirk Park do not have a vehicle.

Each Christmas, Neechi was in danger of closing its doors because the near-by residents were by and large, hamper recipients and not shopping at Neechi. This would mean job losses and further hamper recipients. This doesn't make sense. Why purchase hamper supplies from wealthy suburban grocery chain stores if it's increasing the need for hampers? So LITE was created and raises money each year, purchasing groceries from Neechi and donating them to the Cheer Board. Now LITE operates year round, creating jobs and maintaining existing jobs with a multitude of initiatives (www.lite.mb.ca)

Another example of CED: The Canadian Muslim Women's Institute (CMWI) offers support services to many

newcomers who face multiple barriers to employment including stereotyping, language, education and recognized skills. These women are by and large, stay at home moms who are finding remarkable challenges to entering the job market.

CMWI has created a training program to teach these women sewing skills. These women not only gain a skill, they are doing this in a group setting; socializing and practicing their English. This training program will transform to a social enterprise called SewFair in the spring of 2009. SewFair will retain some of the trainees and others will have gone on to find other job opportunities after having something on their resumes which qualifies them as viable employees. SewFair will be a place for all of us to buy ethically produced and sweatshop-free clothing and bags.

Yet another example of CED businesses is, two worker cooperatives incorporated by the Lost Girls of Sudan. The Lost Boys of Sudan is a phrase coined by aid agencies that assisted many orphaned boys who'd spent years walking to safety during the war in southern



Sudan. The girls, because of many circumstances, were a sorry afterthought. Of the Sudanese refugees brought to Canada during this war, one third came to Winnipeg. The Lost Girls have incorporated a catering cooperative and a residential cleaning cooperative.

Worker cooperatives adhere to the seven internationally recognized cooperative principles. <http://www.ica.coop/coop/principles.html> These principles are not taken lightly. Training, for example, is one principle. While many of these women will not want to remain in their cooperative forever, they are taught on-the-job, transferable business skills while being paid. Skills they would normally have to pay for, business skills, such as reading financials, marketing plans, remitting GST, Employment Standards regulations, etc., are a must teach. These women will not only have these marketable business skills, its being done in a socially inclusive environment that looks at the needs of members before absolute profit. (For Sudanese catering or residential cleaning services phone 218-8830)

Manitoba relies heavily on small to medium sized business to sustain our economy. If we are going to be sustainable, we must reach out to those who are working toward solutions to including those with barriers to employment. We need immigration and aboriginal participation in our economy.

CED, or sustainable development is about collective self-help and inclusion. It does not rely on government, but seeks inclusion from government to act with policies and initiatives that understand our communities can only be strong if we take everyone's economic viability into consideration.

Community Economic Development takes social conditions, individual needs and economic reforms into account. We want a populace that can fend for themselves in a manner that is speaking to the economy, based on human capital and human need. We want people to be economically productive while fulfilling social needs.

Worker cooperatives and other social enterprises are not just "feel-good" endeavors: They are serious

businesses that contribute to the economy in a manner that is sustainable because they look at issues beyond profit. But profit must be made in order to further the social goals. CED recognizes this and supports worker cooperatives and other social enterprises as a means to economic activity.

November 28 is a date to mark on your calendars as the largest Winnipeg CED day of the year. This year, LITE's annual Blueberry Pancake Breakfast and the CED Gathering are both being held on the same day.

The Breakfast will be held at the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre (45 Robinson at Dufferin) from 7:00 am to 10:00 am. This community-partner catered breakfast is a celebration of CED in Winnipeg's inner city and is a highlight of the LITE campaign. Tickets are \$12.00 or \$5.00 for low-income. Come hear Fred Penner and enjoy some pancakes made with local ingredients.

The CED Gathering takes place 9:30 am – 4:00 pm. Join others engaged in all aspects of community economic development for a full day of networking, learning, sharing, and inspiration. With over 30 workshops, this free, all-day event takes place at St. John's High School in Winnipeg's North End (401 Church Avenue). Register online at www.ccednet-rcdec.ca.

Hope to see you there!

