

Canadian Experience helps to materialize the World Indigenous Business Forum in Chile

By Gabriel de Britto Ibrahi

The Canadian Institute “Indigenous Leadership Development Institute” (ILDI), along with the Canadian Embassy, are responsible for the WIBF 2017 Chile Forum. Barb Hambleton, Vice President of ILDI, in an interview with El Mostrador C + C, explained the objectives of the Forum and highlighted what they have achieved in establishing networks among First Nations around the world.

Prior to the creation of what is now known as the World Indigenous Business Forum, spaces for Indigenous Peoples expressing themselves about their economic development strategies were almost non-existent. Organizations such as the Canadian Indigenous Leadership Development Institute were gradually coming up, and together with the creation of a global stage for exposing Indigenous business ideas and models, will establish alliances to create a version of the recognized World Business Forum, but exclusively with the economic contribution of the Indigenous Peoples.

ILDI was established in Canada in 2000 as a non-profit organization, led and formed by Indigenous people. Since then it has been doing a job of building business leadership capacity among Canadian First Nations. It was in 2009 that the current President of the institute, Rosa Walker and Vice President Barb Hambleton, on a visit to the World Business Forum in New York, realized that initiatives to promote entrepreneurship among Indigenous people were lacking.

"There were about 3500 participants and it was difficult to find Indigenous people among them, and we do know that Indigenous Peoples also have a significant participation in the economic development of the world. That is why we felt that a global scenario like that was needed, so in that way our People could promote their successes and share their ideas. Then we asked collaboration with this World Business Forum and in 2010 we could have the first Indigenous version of the Forum. In 2011, we continued in New York, and then we moved to different countries with the intent that different ethnic groups tell their stories and successes – which are not so different along the world," explains Hambleton.

Since it has become an effective platform for promoting meeting and setting of business networks, every edition of the Forum has been registering an increasing interest by Indigenous communities of several countries. The Canadian Embassy is one of the institutions that supports the Forum and will sponsor the "Indigenous Entrepreneurship" panels and the "business to business" session.

"The Forum is an important catalyst in supporting the building of international knowledge networks. It is a positive initiative that seeks to include Indigenous Peoples in modernity, economic development, and innovation, without sacrificing their culture. It also allows a dialogue not only between Indigenous Peoples but also with other actors such as governments, civil society and universities to move towards a better mutual understanding, a key to reaching lasting agreements based on trust", said the Ambassador of Canada In Chile, Marcel Lebleu.

Indigenous Inclusion in Canada

For the Government of Canada, reconnecting with its First Nations is a priority and has been one of the main projects in the country policy, according to Lebleu.

"Supporting the Forum is an opportunity to fulfill part of the task entrusted to us by Prime Minister Trudeau, who has said: 'No relationship is more important to me and to Canada as the relationship with the First Nations. It is time to renew our relationship from Nation to Nation to be based on the recognition of rights, respect, collaboration and partnership. '"

Canada is a global reference in social integration of its minorities, but according to the vice president of ILDI, when business issues were addressed about 15 years ago, there were not so many Indigenous in the business world of Canada.

"We were more focused in life on countryside. Now the world has turned its eyes to Canada when it comes to First-Nation integration and economic. Among these Nations there are successful cases of entrepreneurs and business entities. "

These successes can vary according to the location of these First Nations in the Canadian territory. There are places where to produce and grow is easier than others. This is due to issues of geographical conditions or education of the community itself, the vice president adds.

"We, at ILDI, also work together, helping us to contribute together for the greater purpose that is the economic development of Canada. However, some years before these initiatives materialized, it took a lot for Canadians to recognize that the Indigenous People could be a great contribution to the economy. "

Education was a fundamental element to change the scenario. In addition, Hambleton emphasized that the emergence of ILDI added a significant contribution that was necessary for Indigenous development and consequently of the entire nation.

"With the growing level of education we have been successful in our business, and ILDI helps the community to build leadership and strategic plans. We all work together with our 633 First Nations in order to Canada become a reference in this type of business. I, as an Indigenous person, understand that we are the protectors of the Earth, and my fellows Indigenous also share this idea. So when we conduct business, our cultural values are fully expressed in this. "

Changing the definition of "Indigenous Development"

The debate generated by the World Indigenous Business Forum has promoted some significant changes for society, especially regarding the definition of Indigenous Development. During the seventh edition of the Forum held last year in the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in Canada, a delegation of Indigenous business leaders met to define "Indigenous Development" on its own terms.

In an impassioned conference by the Italian Dr. Ernesto Sirolli, a pioneer in business sustainability highlighted the lack of content available on the Internet that helps to define the term "Indigenous

Development", pointing out the deficiency of finding references on the subject in massive access pages like Wikipedia.

Given Dr. Sirolli's critical view, a commission was then organized to rewrite a better definition that accurately reflects the concept of development of Indigenous Peoples. The commission produced a statement of resolution, in English and Spanish, which was unanimously accepted throughout the Forum and published in various media and even replaced the definition found on Wikipedia.

“In consideration of the cosmology of indigenous populations as exemplified by the common knowledge of its people, and the application to every aspect of life from politics to economics to science, spirituality, morality and philosophy, our definition of Indigenous Development is:

"Indigenous development is the organized effort by Indigenous Peoples to honor, enhance, and restore their well-being while retaining a distinctiveness that is consistent with their ancestral values, aspirations, ways of working, and priorities on behalf of all Future Generations. Their efforts also strive to share a holistic model of livelihood that respects the Creator, the Earth and promotes sustainability now and for the generations to come.” the resolution said. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_development)

The Forum arrives to Chile

In the 2014 edition of the Forum in Guatemala, delegations from Chile began participating in the event and immediately showed great interest in bringing an edition of the Forum to Chile. After several meetings year after year with their leaders, the Chilean delegation led by Mapuche leader Diego Ancalao, finally achieved that the 2017 edition of the event was held in Santiago.

Between October 24 - 26, thousands of guests, leaders and entrepreneurs from all over the world will gather in the capital city of Chile to promote networks and partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous companies that will share their knowledge about leadership, innovation and commerce of First Nations.

"In the Indigenous culture we first build friendship to create a relationship based on trust, and then we do business. For instances, I can mention that in one of the first Forums held, an Indigenous Chief of British Columbia contacted the owner of a famous coffee network in New York. As a result there are branches of this franchise today in their place of origin. There is an impact on the local economy as well, "says the vice president of ILDI.

At least 16 countries are expected to join this edition. Hambleton reaffirms that the Forum is not only focused on First Nations, but also for Governments and industry. From this opportunity of connection it is hoped that strategies can be established jointly to define the routes of conflict that exist nowadays at a global and national level, such as the Mapuche conflict in the region of Araucanía.

"Our community really believes this is a way to build synergy between government, Indigenous Peoples, non-Indigenous Peoples and other nations. Our mission is to 'connect, share and inspire'. We want to connect ideas and share Indigenous business models with our brothers and sisters from all over the world. At the same time we want to expose the challenges that our Peoples had to face in their countries of origin and how we have overcome to these challenges. "