

THE NORTHERN CORRIDOR, FOOD INSECURITY AND THE RESOURCE CURSE FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN CANADA

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ABSTRACT

Food insecurity rates for Canada's Indigenous people are the worst among developed nations, demanding immediate action to prevent an impending health crisis. Food insecurity in Canada is widespread across most First Nations households (51 per cent). The highest food insecurity rates are experienced by the Inuit in Nunavut (63 per cent), First Nations without access roads (65 per cent), and Alberta First Nations (60 per cent). Indigenous peoples' food insecurity is associated with a shorter life expectancy and higher rates of physical and mental illnesses, including four times the diabetes incidence of Canada's non-Indigenous populations. This paper analyzes the impact on food insecurity of a notional trade northern corridor to reach local and global markets, considering case studies of resource and utility corridors.

This research found that, rather than improving food security and providing benefits, trade corridors typically bring a resource curse to Indigenous communities. Also called the 'paradox of plenty,' a resource curse occurs when Indigenous communities, particularly First Nation reserves, experience mainly negative economic impacts when their resources are extracted. A resource curse on Indigenous communities is apparent across Canada, including at Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories and Shoal Lake 40 in Ontario, where oil and water pipelines have resulted in negative environmental, health and socio-cultural impacts without providing permanent road access or long-term jobs, and without reducing high food prices. Also, the resource curse is evident for Alberta's First Nations, which have the highest food insecurity rate of the country's First Nations, despite being covered in pipelines and extractive industries.

To explore the food security impacts of the notional northern corridor, we spatially analyzed its route's proximity to mineral-rich greenstone belts, roads, and Indigenous communities without all-weather road access. The notional northern corridor route transects many rich mineral deposits to reveal a focus on resource extraction. This notional route appears to prioritize the transport of resources to global markets over Indigenous communities' needs. The notional route has six ports traversing First Nation territories under the Indian Act but is nearby to only seven of the 122 Indigenous communities lacking road access. This notional route, thus, is linked to Indigenous-specific systemic racist

legislation of the Indian Act to bypass Inuit lands in Nunavut, Quebec and Labrador, where communities all lack roads but do not fall under the Indian Act. The Crown's Indian Act trusteeship over First Nations gives a legal right to usurp reserve or Crown land for any corridor or development. The Indian Act benefits industry, settler and state to access and own Native land and resources, but not First Nations except regarding sustenance activities. The Federal Crown's trusteeship over First Nations' land and resources makes First Nations' people legal "wards of the state," which has led to inequitable planning control, infrastructure and services. Signs of economic poverty are that most Indigenous communities lack food infrastructure, hospitals, and post-secondary education facilities, with 122 First Nation communities lacking all-season access roads. This inequity indicts Canada for colonialism, racism and failure to uphold the equality clause in its constitution.

The notional route to Hudson Bay indicates that First Nations and food security were not fully included in the conception phase of the Northern Corridor. The notional route cuts through the Indigenous-led protected area proposed in the Seal River Watershed to reach Hudson Bay via Churchill rather than Port Nelson. This notional route would undermine the Indigenous-led protected area and the migration of the threatened Caribou population. Oppositely, the NeeStaNaN corridor proposed by Fox Lake, York Factory and other First Nations goes to Port Nelson and avoids the Seal River Watershed. Free, prior and informed consent should start at the conception phase to include Indigenous interests. In Northern Canada, where Indigenous people comprise the vast majority, infrastructure development should be Indigenous-led to prioritize Indigenous food security. An Indigenous-led, adequately funded strategy to end food insecurity in Canada's Indigenous communities within the next decade is needed to turn around a health and human rights crisis. Removing Indigenous-specific systemic racist barriers to Indigenous control over Native land and adequate funding for infrastructure and services will attain Indigenous food security within a decade.