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Report Reveals Inadequacies of Indigenous Infrastructure

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The Centre for the Study of Living Standards today released a report prepared for the National Indigenous Economic Development Board entitled “An Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities”. The findings of this report were summarized in the National Indigenous Economic Development Board study “Indigenous Economic Progress Report 2019.”

Infrastructure is a key factor in sustainable economic growth, and the quality of life experienced in a community. While much of Canada is experiencing infrastructure development, many Canadian communities still face sizeable gaps in infrastructure. Specifically, Canada’s remote northern communities face a deficit in the infrastructure related to both economic development and quality of life. This deficit is even larger in remote Indigenous communities in Canada’s North, impacting access to basic services such as schooling, health care and potable water, as well as drivers for economic growth.

As the challenges facing remote Indigenous communities in Canada’s North come to the forefront of political discourse, it is important to establish quantitative metrics to measure these gaps to better understand where infrastructure is lacking, and to track the development of infrastructure over time.

To measure this gap in infrastructure, this report develops a composite index using the following key characteristics:

1. The basic unit for the index is the community in remote areas. Communities are defined as either Indigenous (50 per cent or more of the population self-identifies

as Indigenous) or non-Indigenous. Indigenous communities can be disaggregated into First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. Community level data can then be aggregated into sub-provincial/territorial data, provincial/territorial data or national data for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and populations.

2. The index can be used both for comparisons across jurisdictions and Indigenous heritage groups. Going forward, a time series for each community can be built to track progress. It may also be possible to develop a historical series.
3. The index is based on data for 13 indicators for seven types of infrastructure and can be aggregated to infrastructure indicators and infrastructure types primarily related to economic development and indicators primarily related to quality of life.
4. The infrastructure index for each community is estimated by allocating scores from 1 (highest) to 0 (lowest) to the status or condition of the community infrastructure for the different infrastructure indicators and then averaging these scores for the community.

Four key findings of the report are highlighted below.

Remote Indigenous communities in Canada's North score lower than both Southern cities and remote northern non-Indigenous communities.

- While the average index score for Canada's 32 Census Metropolitan Areas is 0.97, remote Indigenous communities in Canada's North score at 0.45.
- Non-Indigenous remote communities score at 0.82, which is 0.37 points above their Indigenous counterparts (0.45).

When controlling for size, remote northern Indigenous communities with a population under 1,000 still fare worse than non-Indigenous communities with a population under 1,000.

- The score of the 11 remote non-Indigenous remote communities with a population under 1,000 was 0.68, closer to the average for Indigenous communities of the same size (0.44).
- Although the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous of this size and remoteness is smaller than the overall infrastructure gap, it still clearly exists in all provinces and territories included in this study

The level of infrastructure in remote northern Indigenous communities varies across provinces and Indigenous heritage groups.

- The jurisdiction that has the highest index value, meaning the smallest infrastructure deficit between Indigenous communities and cities in southern Canada, was Saskatchewan at 0.58. Second was Yukon (0.56), followed by Alberta (0.54), British Columbia (0.51), Manitoba (0.46), and Northwest Territories (0.45). The jurisdiction with the lowest score was Nunavut at 0.30, followed by Newfoundland and Labrador (0.32), Quebec (0.36), and Ontario (0.41).
- Among the three heritage groups, the infrastructure gap is greatest for Inuit (0.31), followed by First Nations (0.48) and Métis (0.64).

The report is posted at <http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2019-04.pdf>.

A supplementary report titled “An Improved Connectivity Component for an Infrastructure Index for Remote Indigenous Communities” was also published by the CSLS and develops the methodology used for the indicator to measure broadband connectivity. This report can be found <http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2019-05.pdf>.

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The Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) is a national, independent, Ottawa- based not-for-profit research organization. Its primary objective is to contribute to a better understanding of trends and determinants of productivity, living standards, and economic well- being in Canada through research.