

## ***Introducing the Resources, Economy, and Society Research Group (RESRG) at Lakehead University***

November 15, 2014

Whether we consider ourselves scholars or activists (or perhaps both), there is little doubt that the current challenges we face both locally and globally are too complex, and indeed too immense, to deal with on our own, or in a piecemeal fashion. The dominant problems of our time, ones which range from climate change and environmental degradation to social inequality, political instability, and the growing gap between the rich and poor, are inextricably linked and demand innovative, comprehensive approaches to questions of sustainable development, and social and economic change.

The current need for cooperation between academic disciplines, and between diverse communities working on a wide range of developmental issues, has been reflected in recent years by a pronounced shift in research funding priorities. At the federal level, for example, organizations such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), CIDA/Foreign Affairs, and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) have moved strongly in the direction of collaborative, targeted, interdisciplinary projects. Inspired by this shift, academics across Canada (and around the world) have begun to rethink their relationships not only to the communities around them, but also to the very institutions they work in, and are now engaging increasingly in research that is both critically-engaged and action-oriented. Freeing themselves from the disciplinary silos in which they have traditionally worked, scholars now frequently work with each other across disciplines, and in recent years have begun to form fruitful working relationships with practitioners, policy makers, NGOs, social movements, and community members.

It is within this context of interdisciplinary cooperation and community-based collaboration that the Resources, Economy, and Society Research Group (RESRG) was formed at Lakehead University in Spring 2014. Funded by

the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's Aid to Small Universities grant, RESRG was founded as a means of building research capacity by encouraging new research activities among faculty with diverse interests and experience. Focusing on issues related to local, regional, and global development, our research group brings together scholars from multiple disciplines working on issues pertaining not only to Canada, but also to Latin America, India, Africa, and Europe.

As academics working locally but thinking and researching globally, we feel we are in a unique position to develop projects and produce outcomes that are both relevant and groundbreaking. Globalization processes, for example, combined with new resource discoveries in Northwestern Ontario, are creating substantial problems that need to be addressed. The need for innovative, interdisciplinary research has become increasingly apparent in light of current discussions around the so-called Ring of Fire mineral discoveries, and also in light of conversations that have emerged in the wake of the recent acquisition of Terrace Bay Pulp by an Indian foreign multinational, Aditya Birla Group. As the work of some of our RESRG researchers suggests, these are examples of Northern developments that can be studied in the light of insights learned from the challenges of resource development in the Arctic, and of global mining and forestry industries in the Global South. Many analysts are arguing, in fact, that the North is the new South.

By developing research capacity in cooperation with local communities, RESRG is in a position to develop innovative comparative research on questions of economic, environmental, and sociopolitical development and sustainability. Our expertise and research interests are broad, ranging from community forest management and Arctic development, to the history and sociology of labour. Moreover, beyond our interest in

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applying lessons learned in the Global South to questions of sustainable development in the Global North, our researchers are also pursuing projects that seek to understand the radicalization of social movements on both the right and the left, and which promise to break new ground in the people's history of global warming.

Providing Lakehead University faculty and students with new opportunities to collaborate across disciplines and backgrounds, RESRG is

dedicated to sustainable development and increased interaction with like-minded scholars and programs at other institutions. RESRG is committed to helping support a research-intensive culture in Social Sciences and Humanities at Lakehead University, and to building bridges with scholars working in Natural Resource Management. Our goal is to create a new venue for enhancing research in the region, and for increasing research funding, recruiting research talent, and "modeling" research activity within the university and in the community.