

Exploring Community Benefits Frameworks as a Tool for Addressing Intersections of Equity and the Green Economy in Toronto's Urban Development

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Abstract : Toronto is in the midst of an urban development and infrastructure boom. Population growth and concerns about urban sprawl and carbon emissions have led to pressure on the municipal and the provincial governments to re-think urban development. Toronto's approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation has positioning of the emerging green economy as part of the solution. However, the emerging green economy many not benefit all Torontonians in terms of jobs, improved infrastructure, and enhanced quality of life. Community benefits agreements (CBAs) are comprehensive, negotiated commitments, in which founders and builders of major infrastructure projects formally agree to work with community interest groups based in the community where the development is taking place, toward mutually beneficial environmental and labor market outcomes. When community groups are equitably represented in the process, they stand not only to benefit from the jobs created from the project itself, but also from the longer-term community benefits related to the quality of the completed work, including advocating for communities' environmental needs. It is believed that green employment initiatives in Toronto should give greater consideration to best practices learned from community benefits agreements. Drawing on the findings of a funded qualitative study in Toronto (Canada), "The Green Gap: Toward Inclusivity in Toronto's Green Economy" (2013-2016), this paper examines the emergent CBA in Toronto in relation to the development of a light rail transit project. Theoretical and empirical consideration will be given to the research gaps around CBAs, the role of various stakeholders, and discuss the potential for CBAs to gain traction in the Toronto's urban development context. The narratives of various stakeholders across Toronto's green economy will be interwoven with a discussion of the CBA model in Toronto and other jurisdictions.

Keywords : green economy in Toronto, equity, community benefits agreements, environmental justice, community sustainability

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