

# INTRODUCING INDIGENOMICS

**How Carol Anne Hilton hopes to change the economic narrative and build a more inclusive, Indigenous approach to business** By Bryan Hansen

**C**arol Anne Hilton is a highly respected Indigenous leader, speaker and author at the forefront of promoting Indigenous economic growth and innovation. She believes the Indigenous economy in Canada could reach \$500 billion in the next five years, and she's determined to help make this a reality.

Of Nuu-chah-nulth descent from the Hesquiaht Nation on Vancouver Island, Hilton is the founder and CEO of the Indigenomics Institute and the Global Centre of Indigenomics. Her work has earned her numerous awards – the Mastercard Game Changer Indigenous Entrepreneur Award and the BC Achievement Foundation's Award of Distinction in Indigenous Business, among them. Her book, *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table*, is a best-seller.

Hilton, who holds an MBA from the University of Hertfordshire in the U.K., is committed to empowering Indigenous peoples and creating positive change for their communities. It was with this goal in mind that she developed the concept of Indigenomics.

Indigenomics, she explains, is all about the process of Indigenous business claiming a seat at the economic table. It's about economics from an Indigenous world view and modern Indigenous economic design. It's "how we design for inclusion," Hilton says, "not only for revenue but also our world Indigenous view for now and future generations."





Indigenomics Bay Street in Toronto, a three-day event on Indigenous inclusion and growth in national and international economies. Also on the horizon is a 24-hour virtual conference, Indigenomics Now.

**GLOBAL LENS**

Building Indigenous economic strength is something Hilton views through a global lens. With this in mind, she recently established the Global Centre for Indigenomics – an international economic collective that aims to facilitate Indigenous economic leadership worldwide. With a board made up of Indigenous thought leaders from Canada, New Zealand and the U.S., the Centre is focused on building an inclusive virtual space for Indigenous business empowerment.

In 2007, Canada was one of four countries that initially rejected the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), but it has since changed its tune and is now viewed as a global leader in recognizing and implementing UNDRIP through its constitutional recognition and commitment to reconciliation.

While New Zealand, Australia and the U.S. also voted against UNDRIP’s adoption in 2007, Australia and New Zealand have made significant strides in modernizing and advancing economic reconciliation since then. “As larger Indigenous population-based countries, both Australia and New Zealand are seeing significant advances around economic reconciliation,” Hilton observes.

Hilton also notes that New Zealand has a strong metric for measuring Indigenous economic outcomes, while Australia is

building its Indigenous trade structure, agreements and zones. Overall, she says, Indigenous-led Nations in the two countries are building economic empowerment and sovereignty and providing a new economic perspective that “brings light and responsibility to the economy in a new way.”

In the U.S., one of the country’s biggest Indigenous business events, the Reservation Economic Summit, regularly attracts over 3,000 attendees across all business sectors. An annual gathering organized by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development, it has always had a strong Canadian presence. This presence has grown exponentially in recent years, which Hilton attributes to increased trade as well as advancements in the tech sector.

With this centred space for the economic narrative, the U.S. Indigenous community is starting to see its economic clout grow. There is also more alignment between American and Canadian Indigenous economic structures, with opportunities for Indigenous business on both sides of the border to collaborate and increase their collective economic strength. This, says Hilton, will help pave the way towards greater economic self-determination. “We are seeing Indigenous economic structures develop and become stronger, which is essential for the Indigenous community’s overall success,” she says.

**IDEAL TIME**

Today, there is growing recognition among non-Indigenous people and organizations of the inherent value of Indigenous knowledge and practices. So it’s a good time for Indigenous business to build on that recognition. “We’re seeing this shift where people are recognizing that Indigenous world views and practices are really important, not just for Indigenous people, but for the broader society,” says Hilton. “We’re seeing more and more people wanting to learn from us and wanting to work with us.”

Indigenous people building their economic power is “truly a reflection of where we come from, and the strength we have as Indigenous people,” says Hilton. That strength is exemplified by Indigenous women like herself who are making their mark at both a national and global level.

In her quest for economic reconciliation and a more balanced Indigenous business approach, Hilton cites her own grandmother, a community Elder, as a source of inspiration. These days, she is active on Facebook Live, broadcasting scenic views of Hesquiaht Nation and offering prayers for her people. “My grandmother says that she doesn’t completely understand what I’m doing, but she knows it’s important, so when she prays for me, she says she squeezes her eyes really tight,” Hilton heartwarmingly reflects.

The world of Hilton’s grandmother is a far cry from the hustle and bustle of business forums and industry events in big urban centres. Yet it is an Indigenous way of life that embodies a spirit which, according to Hilton, can also be found in the Indigenous approach to business. It’s a culture that respects Mother Earth and “brings light and responsibility to the economy in a new way.”

As a result, the potential for Indigenous economic strength is not only vast, it is also deep, and Hilton is determined to do her bit to see it reach that full potential. There is hope for a brighter future for Indigenous peoples and the planet as a whole, as Indigenous economies gain recognition, strength and momentum across the globe. ●



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