

past two decades. Many claims have been settled, and negotiations continue on others. There are two types of claims:

- the comprehensive claims are based on Aboriginal title arising from traditional use and occupancy of land not covered by treaties or other means; and
- the specific claims arise from the non-fulfilment of treaties or alleged wrongdoing on the part of the Crown related to the administration of Indian lands and other assets.

Both types of claims provide an opportunity to establish a land and economic base. In some ways, they are also important to the realization of Aboriginal self-determination, though they do not, in themselves, constitute self-government.

### **Political Development**

Constitutional changes that would recognize Aboriginal's inherent right to self-government remain an important goal for Canada's First Nations. Some First Nations already have community self-government arrangements that provide them with control on matters related to lands and land use, resources, health and social services, education and local taxation. The decision to pursue community-based self-government agreements is made by individual First Nations, and arrangements are tailored to meet the unique circumstances of their communities.

### **Economy**

Aboriginal entrepreneurs are participating more than ever before in the national economy and in every business sector with support from governments and the private sector.

Today, some 10 000 businesses are owned and operated by Aboriginal people. Resource development projects touch on many sectors, including commercial real estate development, forestry, tourism and mining.

### **Education and Jobs**

Because most First Nations now have control over education programs in their communities (329 of the 363 on-reserve schools), student attendance has improved and the dropout rate has decreased. More than 63 percent of Indian and Inuit elementary and secondary students receive some instruction in their own language.

Nearly 22 000 Aboriginal students pursued post-secondary studies in 1992-93 in the fields of commerce, management and business administration, engineering, applied sciences and technology and trade. The number of Aboriginal people with post-secondary education and job skills matched to today's workforce needs is increasing. Government programs are also improving employment prospects and encouraging career progression for Aboriginal people in the federal public service and the private sector.

### **Social Conditions**

Living conditions for Aboriginal people lag behind those of the general Canadian population in many ways. Over the last 25 years, however, efforts have been made to improve the living conditions in First Nations communities. Today, the administration of most social programs has been transferred to Indian institutions. In the 1960s, many Aboriginals lived in seriously inadequate housing with no electricity, water or sewage systems. Today, more than 80 percent of homes have adequate water and sewage facilities. Electricity is available in virtually all communities. More than 30 percent of the current housing stock has been built in the last five years and a further 35 percent has been renovated.

Because living conditions are improving, the health of Canada's First Nations has improved considerably. Better access to quality health care and greater community involvement in health education and delivery are also contributing factors. The federal government is also working with Aboriginal groups and the provinces and territories to make the current system more responsive to the culture

and traditions of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal communities also have the opportunity to develop community police services that meet their cultural values and needs.

### **Environment**

Aboriginal people have much to offer in the effort to improve the environment. First Nations are developing their own plans to deal with environmental issues and are partners in government programs to shape policies and initiatives that will ensure the responsible management and preservation of the environment.

### **Culture**

Today, Aboriginal culture is being reasserted as a key to community pride and self-reliance. Aboriginal languages, culture and history programs have been instituted in schools. Centres that promote Aboriginal culture, languages and traditional beliefs and practices can be found across the country and are increasingly being used to combat social problems. Elders are once again playing a vital role and linking the generations.

Numerous Aboriginal newspapers and an extensive network of Aboriginal radio and television services provide programming to their communities in their own languages. The work of Aboriginal artists is increasingly being accepted by the mainstream art community in Canada and abroad.

### **The Future**

Aboriginal people are taking control of their future. Increasingly, they are gaining access to the same opportunities as other Canadians. The momentum for change is clear and strong, and more improvements can be expected in the years ahead. 

