

Submission by
Centre for Appropriate Technology
To the
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

CAPACITY BUILDING INQUIRY Submission No. 47

Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous
communities

1 Introduction

The Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) is making this submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in response to the Inquiry into Capacity Building in Indigenous Communities.

For the purposes of this submission CAT will use the definitions of *service delivery* and *capacity building* outlined in the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry.

"*Service delivery*, among other things, provides and maintains physical infrastructure and provides professional services for some or all in a community".

"*Community capacity building* refers to helping individuals and organisations within communities to gain the skills and tools to achieve, or successfully engage others to help achieve, community (or regional) goals."

In developing this submission CAT has made the assumption that the point of service delivery is to contribute to improving the quality of people's lives.

CAT is a non-profit Indigenous organisation with specialist expertise in technology for remote Indigenous communities. CAT's vision is of happy and safe communities of Indigenous people and its purpose is to secure sustainable livelihoods through appropriate technology. CAT provides information and practical assistance with housing, water supply, wastewater, energy, solid waste, communications and transport and other infrastructure

issues. CAT supports communities through community development planning, training processes and project management.

CAT was established in Alice Springs in 1980, and a regional office for North Queensland was established in Cairns in 1994. A regional office for north-western Western Australia was established in Derby in 2000.

In addressing the Terms of Reference CAT has focused on our sphere of experience - remote communities and the areas of service delivery mentioned above. Many of the observations, principles and strategies put forward, however, are applicable to urban communities and other areas of service delivery.

This submission gives CAT's thinking on the subject to date and is informed by CAT internal discussions and documents, and external literature including outcomes of the Capacity Building Workshop at the Community Technology 2001 Conference and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Water Report.

2 Background Information and Current Status

2.1 Remote Communities

The number of remote Indigenous communities has grown over the last 30 years. There are now approximately 110,000 Aboriginal people living in 1291 discrete communities with an average size of 107 people.

A total indigenous population of 352,970 was recorded in the 1996 census, representing just under 2% of the Australian population but nearly 20% of Australia's remote population. Thirty one percent of Indigenous people (31%) lived in discrete Indigenous communities in 1999, the remaining number lived in cities and large urban localities.

In 1992 ATSIIC identified 907 communities of which 819 were in remote regions. This has grown to 1291 in 1999; an increase of 470 communities Australia wide. Some of this increase is due to communities being identified this time around that were left out in 1992.

Community Size	0 to 20	21 to 50	51 to 100	101 to 200	Over 200	Total
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No of Communities	644	299	102	97	149	1,291
Total Population	5,682	8,889	6,765	12,779	75,879	109,994
Percentage of Population	5.2%	8.1%	6.2%	11.6%	69%	100%

Of the recorded 1291 communities, 943 had less than 50 people in them (73% of all Indigenous communities have less than 50 people). Conversely 69% of those Indigenous people living in discrete non urban communities are in communities of greater than 200 people. These figures vary widely across the States and Territory.

The small size and high levels of mobility in many of these regional communities, combined with a lack of access to specialised services, low levels of technical training and formal skills and small community budgets, make provision of services extremely challenging and more expensive relative to urban service delivery.

2.2 Infrastructure in Indigenous Communities

It is widely recognised that many investments in housing and infrastructure in Aboriginal communities have failed to produce long-term improvements in community well-being. Commonly, facilities such as houses, power plant, and water supplies are not adequately maintained and so, over time, they fall into disrepair. Initially their performance is impaired and eventually they become completely unserviceable.

The HREOC Water Report had four major findings of the review of case study communities. These were:

- 1 In general terms there has been a serious effort to address the water and sanitation needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- 2 The trend has been to improved water and sanitation services and greater access to technical options and service providers.
- 3 The delivery of infrastructure has benefited from improved competence in project management and professional services. Modified program guidelines have resulted from careful review and evaluation of performance.

- 4 There is a lack of evidence to suggest that despite this increased investment and improved technical delivery, the water and sanitation systems will be sustainable. Reports examined and case studies reviewed indicate that assessment of health outcomes is problematic, employment outcomes have been difficult to demonstrate and training and human capacity building has been incidental rather than fundamental to the outcomes.

The HREOC Report also stated:

"There is evidence from the review of international experience and the many background papers in the native title debates that sustainable solutions may still be difficult to achieve through the current delivery model.

"Issues which will necessarily impact on sustainable outcomes are:

- Human capacity and willingness to support interventions both physically and financially;
- The relatively unspecialised nature of the small remote communities.
- The lack of a 'market' per se in small communities and the limitations of the 'market or competition model' for service delivery;
- The limitations of a special measures approach to human development.

"The review found that while technical delivery and issues of consultation and cultural understanding has improved over the past 5 years, many of the core issues identified in the 1994 Report remained valid and still required a response before indigenous people would have confidence that their water and sanitation would be sustainable.

"The fundamental shift is from the provision of services to facilitating capacity to access services. Whilst Government has a responsibility to raise human capital to a level where it can access services it has to do so within a balance of rights and not creating welfare dependency."

In ATSI's 1999 "Essential Services Costs in Remote Indigenous Communities" it was estimated that some \$66m per annum is required to adequately operate and maintain the essential services of water, sewage and electricity currently installed in discrete Indigenous communities. This did not include housing maintenance. \$42.5m per annum of known funding was identified, leaving a shortfall of \$23.5m per year. The Commonwealth State Working Group on Indigenous Housing consider an annual figure of \$27m

would be required at current rates to fill the gap for recurrent expenditure on housing.

The following statistics are taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics "Housing and Infrastructure in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities" (1999). All information given below refers to the period 12 months prior to the survey being undertaken.

2.2.1 Housing

Of the 14789 community owned or managed permanent dwellings (91% of all permanent dwellings) in discrete communities 23% were in need of major repairs and a further 10% required replacement.

2.2.2 Water Supply

35% of communities with a population of 50 or more reported they had experienced water restrictions. Equipment breakdown was reported as the main contributing factor to these restrictions, and was more commonly reported than climatic reasons, such as dry season shortages. Water samples from 169 communities (73%) were tested for quality. Of these communities, 34%, with a combined population of 25,322 people, provided samples which failed testing at least once.

2.2.3 Electricity

Interruptions to power supply occurred in 80% of communities with a population of 50 or more. 43% of these experienced less than 5 interruptions and 20% reported 20 or more interruptions. Equipment breakdown, storms and planned outage for maintenance were the main contributing factors reported.

2.2.4 Sewage Systems

While almost all communities and dwellings had some form of sewage system, a high proportion of communities reported problems with their system. Of the communities with a population of 50 or more, 59% reported overflows or leakages. Dwellings were affected by these overflows or leakages in almost 90% of these communities. Almost 10% of communities with a population of 50 or more reported 20 or more overflows, indicating chronic sewage problems. Sewage overflows or leakages were experienced by communities of all sizes, but were more prevalent in larger communities. Reasons

reported by communities were blocked drains (55%), equipment failure (39%) and insufficient capacity of the septic system (26%)

An important issue for Indigenous people living in remote communities relates to access and equity. It seems important that the pursuit of uniform quality standards in areas such as housing, water and sanitation should not inadvertently disadvantage Indigenous people. It is more important to monitor health and environmental outcomes than to apply what may be unsustainable or unaffordable standards or inputs.

2.3 Community Councils and Aboriginal Corporations

It is well known that many Aboriginal Corporations are in breach of the rules which govern their organisations and are subsequently in administration or their operation has been discontinued.

Aboriginal Corporations are incorporated under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*. In 1996 when the "Review of the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976" was undertaken by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies there were 2,600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations set up under this Act, most of which were receiving funds to provide services to their communities.

Some of the key findings of the review were that the ACA Act, in its present form:

- is not suited to the varying needs of indigenous groups across Australia for their incorporation and effective decision-making; and
- has not made a useful contribution to the achievement of accountability.

The review recommended that "the ACA Act be rewritten, returning to its original purpose of a simple law, flexible enough to allow Indigenous groups across Australia to incorporate in ways which are appropriate to them."

(It is interesting to note that the Act has not been altered since this review and there is currently another review taking place. According to the website of the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations: "In November 2000, the Acting Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations commissioned a major review of the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976 ('the ACA Act'). The purpose of this Review is to see how well the ACA Act meets the current needs of Indigenous people, and to identify areas for reform.")

Often those within the corporations do not have the capacity to meet the "upward accountability" requirements of the corporation, due to their lack of education and experience. The time and effort spent attempting to fulfil these requirements often impairs their ability to be "downward accountable", ie to deliver the services to the community that the corporation was set up to provide.

Similarly, it is well known that Community Councils experience serious difficulties which impact on their communities. In some cases the Councillors do not have the capacity to ensure financial and management accountability of the Council employees, such as the Chief Executive Officer and accountant. Councillors are leaders in the community and almost invariably have numerous other responsibilities (see Section 5.2 on Leadership), and generally do not receive a salary for their work as a Community Councillor. External agencies, with responsibility for appointing employees, do not appear to have sufficient capacity to ensure this upward accountability either.

It is not unusual for the finances of Community Councils to be mismanaged by CEO's and for the results to impact heavily on the community. Community shops close down, CDEP days are reduced and essential machinery is sold off. Community morale diminishes significantly during these times, especially when these employees are not held accountable for their actions.

It also appears to be rare for Council employees (in management positions) from outside the community to successfully transfer skills to community members, so that there is little capacity building within the councils and CEO's must continue to be employed from outside the Community.

2.4 Roles and Responsibilities

Government departments and agencies, Community Councils, Indigenous Organisations all have certain roles and responsibilities for service delivery. Unfortunately, it is sometimes unclear to community members and to the external agents themselves exactly what those are.

It is often the case that in one region there are a large number of government departments and agencies and Indigenous organisations providing services. It is sometimes the case that of these there are a

number with a mandate to provide similar, or overlapping, services. The government departments and agencies, and at least some of the Indigenous organisations, are usually located in major centres, away from the Indigenous communities. This means that representatives of these external agencies visit communities on a regular or irregular basis, depending on the projects or programs they are running at the time.

In CAT's experience community people complain often about the amount of time they spend in meetings, and are often unsure exactly who it was they were meeting with or what the point of the meeting was. It is sometimes the case that the community representatives do not take good information back to their community. In general, community people are often confused about the roles and responsibilities of the organisations which visit their community.

Agencies, departments and organisations generally do not appear to communicate and coordinate programs, projects and visits well with each other.

An outcome of the CT2001 Conference was that:

"Agencies must make sure that the community is clear about their own roles and responsibilities as well as those of others, and that the community understands about the services that can be provided and by whom. It is necessary to value both success and failure. Evaluation of initiatives and continuity of learning is essential to progress."

3 Picture of the Future

What would it look like if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had the capacity to effectively manage the delivery of services to their communities at the local and regional level such that their needs were met and their livelihoods were sustainable?

The aim of this submission is to stimulate thinking on what this "picture of the future" might look like and the shifts in national policy that are required to enable this picture to emerge. A possible vision may be of communities of happy, healthy, safe people, each of whom have the opportunity to reach his or her potential, and contribute their individual skills and strengths to their own, and the community's, wellbeing.

3.1 What would this picture of the future look like?

So what would it look like to have a community of happy, healthy, safe people, where each person has the opportunity to reach his or her potential, and contribute their individual skills and strengths to their own, and the community's, wellbeing? What would individuals, families, community organisations and government agencies and departments be doing?

- Communities have appropriate services which fulfil the expressed needs of their residents.
- Roles and responsibilities of community members, community organisations and external agencies and departments are clearly defined and have been agreed upon by all parties.
- Community members, community organisations and agencies and departments have access to the skills, resources and support structures to be able to fulfil these responsibilities.
- There are competent people in government departments and agencies who are good communicators, flexible and innovative in their thinking, able to listen to people's needs and have authority to make decisions.
- Government departments and agencies communicate with each other. They are aware of what other agencies are doing and are taking a "whole of government approach" to programs and projects.
- Government programs and projects are flexible enough to respond to people's actual (not perceived) needs. Community people have the information and capacity to decide which programs they want to be delivered in their community and which they don't.
- There is appropriate and timely access to information and good communication within and between community members, community organisations and government agencies and departments.
- Community leaders are "downward accountable", meaning that first and foremost they are accountable to their community who they represent.
- There are a variety of community organisations in the community whose focus is to work on the agendas of the community. They use transparent processes and are accountable to the community. They have access to sufficient resources, skills and support to be "downward accountable" to the community, as well as meeting the "upward accountability" requirements of funders.

- Programs and projects are evaluated and their successes and failures valued and learnt from. Evaluations are communicated effectively to all stakeholders.
- Communities have the choice of a range of competent service providers.
- Opportunities for economic development that are appropriate to the needs and resources of the community.

In this submission CAT addresses key theme areas and proposes strategies to address each area.

4 Approach and Principles

There is a tendency in the field of service provision (and in the very notion of service provision itself) to think of communities as passive recipients rather than active participants in making choices about their own direction. For communities to be "active consumers" rather than passive recipients of services, service delivery needs to be "demand-responsive" rather than "supply-driven". Clearly, in the context of remote Indigenous communities, it would be unrealistic to think of supply and demand in the sense of a pure, or even modified, market economy. Therefore what is needed to improve service delivery is to identify strategies that will lead to people becoming active consumers.

For people to be "active consumers", ie actively involved in service delivery, they need to have the capacity to make the decisions about the kinds of services they need. To make decisions about these services people first of all need for these issues to be high enough up their priority list to think about them. They also need to be able to access the resources and support to work on their own agendas.

There are some basic principles CAT considers important in its approach to capacity building for service delivery, including:

- Participation
- The need for community development to complement service delivery
- Solution-focused practice

4.1 Participation and Models of Service Delivery

Often there has been a gross mismatch between the sophisticated and expensive technology being transferred to many parts of the developing

world, and the economic settings in which the technology is expected to function.

A study of 121 projects in 49 countries concluded that:

"..... sustainability of services, economic benefits, percentage of the target population reached and environmental benefits all increased in proportion to the level of user participation.¹

The study concluded that participation required a fundamental shift from centralised ownership of systems to local ownership and control. And approaches had to cease to be *supply-driven* and become instead *demand-responsive*. Such a shift in thinking requires that far more attention is paid to consumer demand in designing and managing services. This has meant that project planners need to establish rules and procedures that enable demand to be expressed and encourage efficient and effective choices to be made.

The provision of services is no longer seen as a construction job to be hired out to the most cost efficient contractor, but as a contribution to the economic, social and human development of people, including their skill, knowledge and organisational capacity. The success of these processes - not the technical perfection of systems - ultimately decides whether services are used, are sustainable, and have an impact on health and quality of life.²

The key conceptual shift that has taken place is the substitution of the notion of beneficiaries of services with that of consumers of services. Where services are consumer driven, demand has to have reached a point where there is significant public appreciation of the value of services - for convenience, health and quality of life reasons - an understanding by consumers of what they can and cannot afford, how the services they select work, and how their providers and managers are performing.

The overwhelming challenge in the provision of services is how to create demand and match service provision to it in a transparent, accountable and affordable fashion, without losing sight of the basic human rights.

¹ Black, Maggie., Learning What Works: A 20 Year Retrospective View on International Water and Sanitation Cooperation, UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Program, 1998, p44

² Black, Maggie., Learning What Works: A 20 Year Retrospective View on International Water and Sanitation Cooperation, UNDP-World Bank Water and Sanitation Program, 1998, p70

There are a number of factors that would cause some rethinking of this international learning in the Australian context. Most remote Indigenous communities in Australia do not function within a market economy in the same way as even poor villages in developing countries. Remote Indigenous settlements share few of the elements which would lead to the formation of a settlement in an international context. Further, the mobility of Indigenous people, generally throughout their regions, is a factor which is less relevant overseas except for herding or hunting communities. Finally, Indigenous people have only limited resources with which to engage a market economy.

4.2 Community Development

Community development is not a substitute for service delivery, but necessary for positive service delivery outcomes.

"The fundamental basis of community development is found in the community's ability to organise, prioritise, plan and implement steps to respond to an issue or shared problem which has been identified by members of a community. This approach maintains that people are more important than projects. In other words, in order to develop healthy communities, people must have the capacity and opportunity to work together to make decisions and to take action on problems or issues which are mutually important to them."³

In the Dillon Report (2000) some key observations included "It is clear to me that "addressing" needs through individual, government funded projects does little to address the underlying causes of the problems in the communities. If anything, I believe that the current service delivery approach has perpetuated the cycle of dependency rather than alleviated it."

Both Dillon and Krawll, quoted above, advocate community development work as vital to improving people's lives in Indigenous communities. If people do not have the opportunity and resources to be able to work on their own agendas opportunities for capacity building and better management of service delivery will continue to be severely limited.

³ Krawll, M. (1994) "Understanding the Role of Healing in Aboriginal Communities", Ministry of Solicitor General of Canada.

4.3 Solution-focused practice

A principle CAT uses in working with communities is to be solution-focused rather than problem-focused. The North Queensland office has used their knowledge of participatory planning and "strengths-based practice" in community planning, training and infrastructure selection projects.

Solution-focused practice is a social work tool developed by St Luke's Innovative Resources. It aims to assist people to recognise and value their strengths and solution-finding abilities. It assists people to work out what resources they have, what the constraints on a situation are and the steps needed to achieve their visions. Some principles behind this practice include:

- People have the strengths and capabilities to solve their problems and are their own best experts;
- Resources should be provided in such a way that *complements* people's existing strengths and resources rather than *compensating* for deficits;
- All problems have exceptions which give clues to solutions. For example if the problem is: "It is hard to get anything organised in our community (eg service delivery)". An exception to this is how well people often organise large events such as weddings. We then need to find out how and why and under what conditions this exception occurs and help the community to think about how to make it work in other situations.

5 Theme Areas and Strategies

5.1 Agendas

Service delivery must respond to the agenda of the community.

An important principle is that community members do in fact have their own agenda, which may or may not be in accordance with the agenda of external departments. The community may have all sorts of other priorities apart from improving delivery of a particular service, or building their capacity to manage the delivery of that service. To really be "active consumers" people need to be operating on their own agendas, that is, people will only actively engage with projects that are important to them.

Say, for example, the relevant government department has decided to upgrade the water supply of a community. This may or may not be the highest priority of the residents. Or it may be important, but not their

highest priority. They might be more interested in getting access to cheaper food, or planting more shade trees, or better health care. Although we don't know what all these priorities are as they will vary from community to community, we do know that they exist, and that it is these issues that the residents will be most motivated to take action on. We also know that they will not be motivated to take action on issues that are not high on their own priority list.

In reality this is what self-reliance is about: allowing and supporting communities to take action on their own agenda. The definition of *community capacity building* given in the Terms of Reference for this submission is "helping individuals and organisations within communities to gain the skills and tools to achieve, or successfully engage others to help achieve, community (or regional) goals." Implicit in this definition is that the goals mentioned are the community's, not those of an external agent. Capacity building in this sense is about people developing the ability to take action and make change according to their own agenda. It is essential that space is created for community's agendas to emerge. Driving a project according to an external agenda does not support the development of self-reliance.

A useful question to ask on any particular project is whether the issue is of sufficient priority for the community residents that they will be motivated to take action on it, and that this action will have the effect of building self-reliance.

If, for example an infrastructure program is being delivered to a community, it must work to the community's agenda wherever possible. This means addressing infrastructure issues according to the community's own order of priorities. The community decides what to do first, and how much to spend on it, based on comprehensive information being made available to them.

5.2 Leadership

There is a diversity of leaders taking on a variety of leadership roles. Leadership needs ongoing support, not just training.

There are abundant opportunities for leadership in all areas of community life. In CAT's experience it often appears that there are few leaders, each taking on several (or many) roles, who are generally not well-supported. This

leadership may range from a young man in his twenties completing his apprenticeship, serving on the Community Council, coaching the kids' football team and leading his family in running a cattle station, to a grandmother looking after several grandchildren on her own, running the community Women's Centre, and taking part in the community Justice Group.

Such leaders are often undertaking these roles in a climate of constant dysfunction and crisis - violence, domestic violence, alcohol abuse in the community and poorly run or collapsing community councils are a reality in many communities. Leaders are also often operating with little support and guidance in the areas in which they are taking leadership.

Community leaders are the people who interact with service delivery organisations. Any leader in a community is subject to the constant requirement of attending meetings with whichever agency or department is in the community this week, to talk about their new program or project. These meetings are almost invariably initiated by outside agencies.

Part of a leader's role is to train and support other leaders and devolve leadership responsibilities, and with so much to do, so little support and the climate of crisis this is often difficult to achieve. Current leaders need to be well-supported and have access to good information in order to nurture new leaders.

Leaders may or may not require a leadership training course. More likely they are doing a good job as a leader under difficult conditions, but need to spend less time in meetings with agencies so they can get on with their work. Perhaps they need some training in conflict resolution so that the council can function better and they can work out a strategy for managing the contractors who are putting in new septic systems in the community. Each situation will be different and a one size fits all training course in leadership or community management may not be the most appropriate response, the leader's highest priority nor an efficient use of resources. So how do we know what is the leader's highest priority? To find out we need skilled communicators with access to relevant information who are able to really listen to the leader's needs and facilitate access to relevant information, support, services, training, etc, while building the leader's capacity in sourcing these him or herself in the future.

Leaders need to be supported to work on the agenda of the community, to have the skills to negotiate for the services they require and to have access to good information. To be effective all leaders need support and people to talk through their ideas with. It would assist leaders to have access to someone they know and trust who is capable of listening to their issues, helping them to think through them and connecting them with information and services relevant to their needs. This support may be in the form of a community development worker.

5.3 Communication and Information

Good communication requires time, the building of relationships and attention to detail.

"Active consumers" require information which is relevant, appropriate, timely and accessible. Community members, communities and community organisations require adequate information to make choices about the services they need. CAT is often approached by communities seeking advice on technology, appliances and infrastructure for their particular situation or for assistance in working out the best way to organise a service. CAT uses participatory decision-making techniques when working with communities.

Key outcomes of the Community Technology 2001 Capacity Building Workshop identified a need for improved, better quality, two-way information sharing through:

- the use of appropriate media and communication tools, and
- sharing information with communities through effective community and traditional structures

There was a call for:

- experienced agency and government workers who are skilled communicators and who have the authority to make decisions on behalf of their agency when necessary
- increased continuity of contact between agencies and communities to build familiarity and trust
- increased clarity of the role and function of external agencies, and
- NGO support to provide objective, high quality assistance in the areas of community planning, mediation, negotiation, etc.

Much of the work of the new national Bushlight renewable energy program managed by CAT and ACRE will focus on developing ways in which people can access information which enables them to make choices about the most appropriate systems to provide the energy services they require. This will include the design of the actual systems to suit the specific needs of each household, as well as maintenance training and planning how to budget for maintenance costs.

It is also important that positive experiences are able to be transferred between locations so that communities can learn from each other about what has worked well for them and how they were able to make this happen. Much of CAT's communications work through video, radio (the regular Our Place radio program) and print (Our Place magazine) concentrates on promoting better

sharing of experience across the country. This is critical for effective governance, where many resource agencies are looking for effective ways to manage services.

Case Study

Good Information for Decision Making

In CAT's experience it is often the case that community people do not have the basic information required to make decisions. In the course of some of its planning projects CAT has spent significant amounts of time assisting people to understand issues (such as land tenure, land transfer processes and Native Title) that are outside CAT's core areas of expertise and experience. CAT was able to use its participatory information sharing techniques to assist communities in understanding these issues.

In a particular planning project CAT undertook, a basic understanding of these issues by the community was essential to working out what they could do with their land. Despite representatives of the community participating in meetings and forums over several years, noone in the community had a clear grasp of the land transfer, tenure or Native Title issues that affected them and their land.

In this particular instance there were several obvious factors contributing (which are common factors in many service delivery situations):

- The issues were complex and difficult for anyone to understand. CAT employees spent a significant amount of time learning about the issues;
- Agencies presented too much complex information too quickly so that people did not even grasp the basic information required;
- Agency representatives did not have the appropriate communication skills, enough time, nor prepare appropriate visual and other resources, to explain the issues;
- Agencies did not ensure that people understood the basic issues before moving on to more complex issues (possibly due to time constraints);
- Community representatives did not bring back information to the rest of the community after attending meetings;
- Community representatives were not necessarily the most appropriate people to be bringing back the information. People were chosen to represent their community for reasons other than having a strong interest in land tenure legislation.

It took a significant amount of time, but CAT was able to explain these issues in such a way that people understood the issues well enough to explain them to each other in their own way and in their own language.

5.4 Local Markets

Communities must have the opportunity to express demand and exercise choices.

Communities often have limited choices of services or service providers. This limits their ability to exercise consumer choice. CAT has worked with local ATSIC offices in WA, QLD and the NT to develop tender processes which encourage competition between service providers and take into account the expressed needs of the service users themselves. There is scope for refining these processes to ensure that the voice of community residents is heard in the selection of tenders and not assumed to be present because Regional Councils are letting the tender.

Again, Bushlight faces similar issues, especially in the provision of ongoing technical support to renewable energy systems. The Achilles heel of many systems (as shown in the CAT/ACRE Renewable Energy in Remote Australian Communities Market Survey, 2000) is that small companies are not in a position to provide ongoing maintenance support to systems beyond the

warranty period. Communities are then faced with very high costs for maintenance visits to remote areas, sometimes to carry out work that could have been avoided through better ongoing management and use of the system. Innovations such as mobile service runs, remote monitoring of renewable energy systems for fault diagnosis and 24-hour technical help lines are being developed for Bushlight.

5.5 Community Governance and Organisational Structures

Organisational structures should be developed not imposed.

To be "active consumers" communities need enabling governance and organisational structures which are transparent and accountable.

It is well-known that formal organisational structures such as Aboriginal Corporations and Community Councils experience serious problems in their operation, however, there are informal organisational structures in communities which are often extremely effective.

Case Study

Recognising Organisational Success Stories

In organising events such weddings and funerals community people often display excellent organisational capacity. People are able to work together such that they can access the resources to cater for sometimes hundreds of people, provide a venue, music, transport, organise for money to be pooled to pay all aspects of the event, as well as providing for the special needs of the elderly, disabled and children. These events are often organised under difficult circumstances and from remote locations. Often people source food and equipment required for such a function from hundreds of kilometres away. Clearly, there are a multitude of useful and potentially adaptable skills displayed in these situations.

These events are clear indicators of the capacity of people to organise extremely well such that their aim is achieved. What makes this situation work and how can it be adapted to other areas such as running an effective organisation or managing the delivery of services? A key element is motivation. Enough people want the event to happen that they are able to organise themselves to utilise the skills and resources available within the community and access resources from outside the community such that a

successful event takes place. This is a clear example of something that is the community's agenda - not a community organisation, agency or government department.

It is important that situations like this are recognised as "success stories" and the skills and capacity of people and the mechanisms at work are recognised, valued, built upon and adapted to other areas. Many of the skills required to organise a wedding are able to be adapted and built upon to manage the delivery of services. Resources need to be provided in such a way that people's existing strengths and resources are complemented as opposed to compensating for deficits.

Aboriginal Corporations often experience problems. Levels of education, skills and training opportunities are often insufficient or inappropriate for such corporations to meet accountability requirements to government. Often much of people's time is spent trying to meet these requirements rather than fulfilling the roles of the Corporation, ie serving the community.

Case Study

Bana Mindilji Aboriginal Corporation

During 2001 CAT undertook a planning project with the Traditional Owners (TOs) of Dawnvale Station (Bana Mindilji) prior to the divestment of the 4,500ha cattle property. The TOs were required to set up an Aboriginal Corporation to hold the lease. At the end of the project the TOs recognised the need for training in areas that would assist them in looking after their land and meeting their legal responsibilities as leaseholders, including running an Aboriginal Organisation. CAT was successful in securing funding for training in several areas and has been coordinating the training programs since early 2002.

CAT is currently working with the TOs on how best to run their Organisation. This involves working out structures and processes which recognise traditional, cultural and current ways of decision-making within the family groups and builds on these processes. A key principle when working out decision-making structures is that no one has to do anything on their own, which contributes to improving upward and downward accountability. A web of relationships is nurtured so that the elected members (eg Treasurer) and the (unpaid) "employees" (eg Bookkeeper) support each other to fulfil their responsibilities.

One of the recommendations of the CT 2001 Conference Capacity Building Workshop was for "education and training of indigenous people to take over local positions occupied by expatriates (all positions to be "training positions")".

5.6 Economic development

Communities need enabling structures to support local economic development.

Economic development may be thought of as people meeting their needs through their own efforts. To be "active consumers" people need to have their own economic power. Economic development may occur within or outside of the mainstream economy. The majority of the world's people operate substantially within local economies. For local economies to flourish community people must be supported to take initiative on their ideas and their efforts not be frustrated by regulation. It is important that there are enabling structures within the community that people can use to meet requirements such as insurance and health regulations. It is possible that the transition to operating in the mainstream economy may be facilitated by first developing the local economy.

Noel Pearson recently commented that: "In the future in Cape York there is no reason why our people cannot live within and move successfully between two real economies and societies. We can maintain our traditional society and economy and we can engage in the outside market economy and society and our children can move with great facility between the two, provided that we ensure that the resources that the State provides us, and indeed the resources we generate ourselves, and which we distribute within our own communities, is no longer in the form of negative welfare."

Case Study

Barriers to Local Enterprise

CAT was recently working with an outstation community who have a solar power system that CAT installed a couple of years ago. The community leader had been thinking about how to pay for maintenance and new batteries for the system in the future. His outstation is surrounded by waterways filled with fish, while the major community (with a population of

1500 people) 150km inland has no good fishing nearby, just an expensive supermarket.

The leader was thinking about packing a few eskies full of fish each Friday and selling them in the community. He believed he could easily transport and sell 50kg a week at \$10/kg. This would equate to a cash income of \$26,000/year. It sounded like a great idea.

The leader, however, wasn't quite ready to get started. He decided that first of all he probably needed a consultant to do a feasibility study. Also he thought he'd probably need to try and get funding for freezers and do a business plan. He had been colonised by the consultant culture to such an extent that he was too scared to sell some fish to his relatives without a business plan to back him up.

As an informal enterprise within the community, this fishing business could be extremely viable. It uses readily available local resources and skills people already have. There is very little requirement for start-up capital and very low overheads.

What would a business planner do with this enterprise? There might be fishing licenses, food safety regulations, registered food transport vehicles, workplace health and safety, insurance, GST registration, payroll tax and so on. He might even need to set up an Aboriginal Corporation. With all these overheads he'd probably need a larger market.

It is important to think about the benefits and risks of informal, community enterprises. It is also interesting to consider the potential of capacity building through participation in the local economy for engaging in the mainstream economy.

The following discussion from the HREOC Water Report provides an interesting analysis of other issues relating to Indigenous economic development:

"Remote Indigenous communities are only partially integrated into national mainstream markets. The proportion of community members in formal full-time employment has been relatively low, and welfare transfers account for a significant proportion of household income. It has been suggested that

the distinctive cultural systems and values of Aboriginal people relate not only to religion, language and art, but also to "economic" practices and values. The strength of these values may not be in keeping with the mainstream economy in areas such as the labour market and enterprises.

"It has also been suggested: "This then brings into sharp relief a fundamental dilemma for policy makers and Aboriginal people alike: how to ensure that the goal of 'economic development' is not an unwitting tool for the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the mainstream society." Such lack of integration, when viewed as a corollary of welfare dependency, has been seen as negative. It has recently been argued that: "To achieve better outcomes, indigenous people need to develop ways of operating in modern society. Such development ultimately has to come from an internal process of cultural and institutional adaptation. It cannot be given from outside. It may, by very careful policy, be assisted; but not more than that."

"The same author considered that "protection", "assimilation" and "self-determination" failed as policies, and concerning the latter: "What is known as "self-determination", but is more aptly labelled "welfarism", has not worked because it has failed to provide structures and incentives helpful for successful adaptation to modern society." It was argued that the policy goal should be to facilitate full Indigenous participation in the benefits of Australian society, the key principles being anti-discrimination, acknowledgment of distinctive culture, participation, and empowerment. For adaptation to be substantively different from assimilation, remote Indigenous communities would need to be viable on the margins of the mainstream economy, and for economic opportunity to be available without trading off key aspects of Indigenous social and cultural life."

5.7 The Role of Indigenous Organisations, Government Departments and Agencies

External agencies need to be more flexible in their approach to service delivery, especially with respect to timeframes.

External agencies require the resources and skills to work effectively with Indigenous communities so that the capacity of the community is built and services can be selected, negotiated for and managed successfully.

It is common that project budgets and timeframes for the delivery of infrastructure do not allow for real capacity building. The lack of capacity building in such projects impacts directly on the sustainability and lifespan of the infrastructure, especially since many infrastructure projects do not have a funding arrangements in place for future maintenance requirements.

Improved project and program flexibility in responding to the expressed needs of communities is required. Recognition that participation and capacity building take time means that funding bodies must recognise that service delivery will have higher up-front costs. Projects require longer timeframes to complete so that there is time for community members to really participate and have a sense of ownership of the process and outcomes. It is not enough to simply add a "Capacity Building" component to a project budget without supporting this with increased

It is important that government departments and agencies recognise the difference between consultation and participation. It takes time to build relationships and trust with people. Without this, it is difficult for external agents to recognise the agendas of the people and the issues that need to be overcome in order for the delivery of services to be successful and sustainable. Again, this requires more time and money. However, it is essential to recognise that these vital aspects of capacity building for service delivery will result in improved outcomes for community people and for the long-term sustainability of the outcomes of the services delivered.

Those working with communities need to be good communicators and be clear about their roles and responsibilities, those of other agencies and those of the community. These roles and responsibilities need to be agreed upon with the community and all parties need to ensure that they fully understand what these entail. Projects and programs should be monitored and evaluated so the lessons learned on what works and what doesn't are not lost.

Further recommendations of the CT 2001 Conference Capacity Building Workshop were:

- external agencies knowing their place (for example, operating only at the request of the community, not making decisions that should be made by the community, not over-riding community decisions and plans);
- development of MOUs with communities; and

- increased monitoring of performance of all external agents operating in communities.

6 Concluding Remarks

It may be useful to begin with a positive view of what is possible in Indigenous communities, a "picture of the future", and work out how to get there from where we are now. It is possible for a vision of communities of happy, healthy, safe people, each of whom have the opportunity to reach his or her potential, and contribute their individual skills and strengths to their own, and the community's, wellbeing, to be realised. The delivery of services and the development of the capacity of community people to manage this can make a significant contribution toward this vision.

For this to happen, however, it must be recognised at all levels that community people do have their own agenda and it is this which they will be motivated to take action on, and where capacity building will take place. There are leaders in communities with a diverse range of responsibilities, who need ongoing support, not just training. The effective informal organisational structures in communities should be recognised and people's skills in these areas built on rather than compensating for deficits.

Service deliverers require more resources for projects to be run over longer timeframes so that there is a real possibility of capacity building. External agencies need to improve communication between themselves, to be clear on their roles and responsibilities so that they can communicate good information to communities. Again, the building of relationships between agencies and community people takes time and is essential for good communication. Government projects and programs need to be more flexible so that they can meet the expressed needs of communities.

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