



AUSTRALIAN  
COUNCIL  
FOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

# Companion Document

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An addendum to the Practice Note on Effective Development Practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities by International Aid and Development NGOs.

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**Note: Working Group to also consider developing an additional section around  
“community training options”**

## INTRODUCTION

This companion document has been developed as an addendum to the revised ACFID Practice Note on *Effective Development Practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities by International Aid and Development NGOs*. It should be read in conjunction with the revised Practice Note.

The document sets out case studies of practical implementation of the principles outlined in the Practice Note as well as suggested tools, resources and readings. These inclusions have either been prepared specifically for this document or have been provided by international non-government organisations (INGOs) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) organisations.

The document recognises that it includes only a limited range of the resources that are available and which practitioners involved in Indigenous Development in A&TSI communities are currently using. However, like the Practice Note, it is a living document and additions are always welcome. ACFID members will facilitate an ongoing dialogue with their respective A&TSI partners and other interested stakeholders to continually refine both the Practice Note and the companion document.

### **Terminology**

Throughout this document wherever possible the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or A&TSI is used rather than 'Indigenous'. Where Indigenous is used it refers to Aboriginal *and* Torres Strait Islander Australians.

## 1. CASE STUDIES

The following three case studies seek to demonstrate effective approaches to Indigenous Development practice. Information for the case studies was provided by members of the ACFID Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program Working Group. Two of the case studies were collated using project evaluation reports and one using academic reports and documents.

Each organisation and project showcased has used their own unique model of implementation while still demonstrating a significant number of the key principles that make for a successful development initiative. Key challenges and learnings are also presented.

### 1.1. The Fred Hollows Foundation - The Women's Development Project

#### Project Background

The Women's Development Project began in 2008 after the Jawoyn women of the East Katherine region identified the need for their women's centres to be strong.<sup>1</sup> The WDP was a community development initiative that utilised an Aboriginal cultural framework to ensure that every component of the program was driven by women involved in the program and focused on four communities in the region.

The overall goal of the project was to increase self determination for women in the Jawoyn Region and was based on the premise that strengthening cultural identity and increasing self determination would result in positive health outcomes. The project ensured resources and opportunities were available for the women to develop culturally appropriate solutions that addressed issues of family health and wellbeing.

WDP was managed by a culturally diverse team employed by The Fred Hollows Foundation (The Foundation) which comprised primarily Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members. The inclusion of the right local staff members on the team meant that the team and the WDP were able to gain access to the four communities at a level otherwise unattainable to outsiders.

The WDP process incorporated lessons learnt along the way which saw a slight change in the key objectives each year in the form of a 'rolling design'. This flexibility enabled the WDP to respond to the women's focus and the direction of the project. Project flexibility also helped to meet the challenges of a changing political landscape at the time.

#### Project implementation

Since 1999, The Foundation has had numerous links with the women's centres in the Jawoyn region primarily supporting nutrition and governance programs. However, the single most important component has been the re-establishment of the Banatjarl Women's Council. The Foundation has worked closely with a local Aboriginal organisation to support the development of the Women's Council that was originally established in 2003. A primary focus of the WDP was working towards the establishment of the Banatjarl Family Resource and Healing Centre on a property forty kilometres south of Katherine.

During project implementation, a key priority of the WDP team was to build a solid relationship with the communities and develop the trust needed before beginning any formal activities. This included ensuring that the team understood the nuances of working effectively at the local level. This commitment to establishing a strong relationship can only happen if agencies intend on forming a long term engagement. In the case of The Foundation, the agency has worked within this region for over a decade. As a result, The Foundation staff have developed relationships, earned respect and established a reputation of working alongside members of the community and in partnership with other service providers in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2007 The Foundation documented views of the Jawoyn women regarding the operation of their women's centres and their vision for the future in the report titled 'We want our women's centres to be strong' (The Fred Hollows Foundation 2007).

The WDP team worked hard to ensure that the project was owned by the women of the region and that the women were responsible for developing activities. This meant that the women were involved in the decision-making process throughout each part of the project. The project aimed to teach skills and to build confidence; and a style that was able to engage with the women.

The WDP team made sure that it was highly visible in all four communities and provided continuous support with ongoing and regular follow up which meant that they could pre-empt major problems. Their consultative and transparent communication style also assisted with this. It was also critical to learn from the women and develop two-way learning to contribute to understanding the community, the women and the systems they worked in.

The team always ensured that the development of WDP activities was done in a culturally appropriate and participatory manner. Starting from where the women were at and making time for women to practice cultural activities such as bush harvesting and fishing endeared the women to the implementation approach taken by the WDP team.

A large component of the WDP was about creating opportunities for the women to have exposure to different and new ways of operating. This often took the form of networking opportunities which were a mixture of highly organised events and less formal activities that involved the four communities. The WDP team also made sure that they were open to asking for advice and building networks and did not pretend to have all the answers. The Foundation has been described as a 'learning organisation' which looks to other solutions and alternatives when plans change.

*As a former Barunga Government Business Manager noted: "One thing that sets The Foundation staff apart from other agency staff is their passion and enthusiasm for their work ... the staff want to make a difference and are focused as a result ... they're not interested in just coming to have a look, the staff are there to do things".*

### **Partnership**

The role of The Foundation in this process was to develop a system that could support the Women's Council to achieve realistic outcomes and continue to build the capacity of the women. The design and implementation approach used by WDP drew on the learnings of community development specialists and practitioners. The chosen methodology for the design and implementation of the WDP was aligned with that of Bottom-Up approaches and embedded in the community development paradigm. The Bottom-Up approach seeks to empower participants by building community control of the change and of project decisions and by ensuring that community needs are responded to throughout all aspects of the project.

### **Successes**

A recent project evaluation<sup>2</sup> found that significant progress has been made towards the WDP's goal for increased self-determination; and that the communities have the capacity to further strengthen their goals. The WDP was also found to be meeting stated objectives through best practice and contributing towards a sustainable environment.

Most significantly, there has been a change in the women's belief that they are capable of not only instigating beneficial changes in their women's centres, but also in other aspects of their own lives. Through collective achievements such as driving a culturally appropriate governance processes at their elections, utilising communication tools to maintain important social networks, implementing new ways of operating their women's centres and participating in civic engagement activities, the women have increased their mechanisms of self determination.

Further, different networking opportunities have allowed for the development of working relationships across the communities. These initiatives have contributed to the women's networking capabilities and resulted in increased shared learning. There have also been examples of improved governance practices in the women's centres following training sponsored by the WDP and subsequently strengthened by learnings that were shared between the women.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Women's Development Project Evaluation Report 2012* by Lisa McMurray at [http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/23392\\_23392.pdf](http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/23392_23392.pdf)

However, the single most important impact has been the establishment of the Banatjarl Women's Council and the election of office bearers. Capacity and self esteem enhancement that led to regular women's committee meetings and the election of Banatjarl Women's Council membership, has ultimately given the Jawoyn women a united voice. This formalises the role of the women's centres in speaking up for their community and taking control of issues that affect women in the region.

Familiarity and trust developed between the women across communities throughout the WDP's implementation has provided the basis for working together and enabling a strong voice for women and families. The women have also identified good practice elements for organisations that wish to work with and implement projects with the Council. This demonstrates a strong voice developing among the women and the confidence to speak out about how they wish to engage with stakeholders.

### **Challenges**

With remote Aboriginal communities already considered to be disadvantaged, the impact of ongoing political changes, which has had particular impact on the Northern Territory in which the project was located, has made it difficult for the women to feel part of society. The political context in which the WDP operates stretches far beyond the impact of the local Aboriginal partner organisations.

The women's centres in the Jawoyn region were directly impacted by the Australian Government's 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response. Not only were women connected to the women's centres personally affected by the measures in the NT Emergency Response Act 2007 but the structure and function of the women's centres drastically changed. Hence, the major and constant change that contextualises the WDP has been extreme and pronounced.

### **Key principles that made this project effective**

The following key principles of effective development practice have been critical in the success of the WDP project.

- a. A community development initiative that ensured that the program was driven by the participants
- b. Use of a 'rolling design' that allowed the program to change and respond to the participants' focus and the direction of the project. Project flexibility helped to meet the challenges of a changing political landscape at the time.
- c. Long-term engagement by implementing body.
- d. Primarily Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff plus non-Indigenous staff with many years experience working in this setting.
- e. Importance of developing strong relationships, earning respect and establishing a reputation of working successfully in partnership with other service providers.
- f. Use of participatory processes throughout the life cycle of the project to ensure a strong level of ownership by participants.
- g. Support for participants to play an integral part in developing all aspects of the project and in all decisions for the project.
- h. The development of project activities in a culturally appropriate manner.
- i. High visibility in the community.
- j. Supporting capacity building of participants and exposing them to new situations.
- k. Seeking of advice by the implementing body where needed and not presuming to have all the solutions.

### **Note:**

This case study has been summarised and adapted from:

1. *The Women's Development Project Evaluation Report 2012* by Lisa McMurray
2. Paper for the 12th National Rural Health Conference 'Women's Development Project—empowering women in the bush' presented by Alison Rogers & Madeleine Bower from The Fred Hollows Foundation.

## 1.2. Caritas Australia and CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes – Manage Your Income Manage Your Life Program

### Project Background

Manage Your Income Manage Your Life (MYI) is a financial literacy program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) people in Western NSW. The program is delivered by CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes with support from INGO, Caritas Australia. It has been described as a 'unique, successful, acclaimed and nationally significant'<sup>3</sup> program.

MYI was first designed in 2004 by and for A&TSI people in Western NSW to combat the low level of financial literacy among the A&TSI community of the region. It has been designed and implemented along community development principles and aims to train A&TSI communities in skills that leave them with a self-determining resource.

The program began by running financial literacy workshop with two specific groups following requests from them for support. The aim was to move from a band aid approach of counselling people with financial issues to a model which would support local people and communities to develop the skills and knowledge required to prevent finance problems from arising in the first place.

MYI has always endeavoured to employ A&TSI team members and has sought to build the capacity of team members involved in the program.<sup>4</sup> MYI team members are supported to gain accreditation through the Financial Counsellors Association of NSW.

### Project implementation

Over time the program has diversified according to community need and this response to the different situations and goals of its participants, has been integral to the success of the program. The changes have seen MYI team members run workshops in areas such as budgeting, financial management, catering, small business enterprise development, healthy eating, grant writing, avoiding sales scams, obtaining a drivers licence, saving for a car, and debt recovery workshops and have helped to establish a community centre for a women's group.

MYI team members have also undertaken extensive community consultations, provided leadership, community building activities and support to community mentors and linked with services by 'referring in' services based on participants needs.

A train the trainer model has formed an integral part of the program and has resulted in the training of and support for community members with an interest in becoming financial 'mentors' in their communities. Over time and with support from the MYI team members this has led to some community members providing information and advocacy on finances and financial services. CentaCare has also developed a Certificate One in Financial Literacy course designed especially for A&TSI communities which community members may undertake.

The program team members have built an extensive network of formal and informal partnerships with a wide range of service providers. The program takes a collaborative approach with service providers, and becomes the bridge that participants need to access a service.

### Partnership

The partnership between CentaCare and Caritas Australia has carried a long-term involvement with it, includes strong personal relationships and the two organisations share values and principles of community development. Both organisations agree that the relationship includes a high degree of openness, trust, transparency and honesty.

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<sup>3</sup> Moxham, N. 2011 Manage Your Income Manage Your Life Project Evaluation

<sup>4</sup> The program supported the first fully qualified Aboriginal financial counsellor in New South Wales and only the second in Australia. By 2011 it had gone on to support another five Aboriginal staff members to become qualified Financial Counsellors. One of these staff members remains the Program Manager for the MYI program.

Caritas Australia has maintained a level of flexibility with funding and shown a willingness to support new approaches as needs have been identified and at the same time has encouraged CentaCare to reflect on the changes they are considering. The partnership with Caritas Australia has provided more than financial support by establishing networking and mentoring opportunities. Caritas Australia has also benefitted from the partnership which continues to educate it about the ongoing legacies of colonisation, the experiences of A&TSI Australians in rural and remote communities of NSW, and the richness of their cultures, practises and spiritualities.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Caritas Australia staff visit the program on an annual basis and spend a number of days with CentaCare team members observing activities and understanding the context in which the program is operating and the subsequent challenges faced by the program.

This provides an opportunity for both organisation to discuss the program together and to consider strategies and lessons learned in a useful way. CentaCare has also introduced an internal monitoring and evaluation system with a focus on data collection and reporting. The information gathered helps to make informed program decisions that assist with improvement of the program.

CentaCare also actively provides guidance for and participates in Caritas Australia's annual gathering of A&TSI partner organisations, which provides an opportunity for partners to connect with one another, learn about each others' work including the successes and the challenges they face, and establish their own partnerships.

### **Successes**

The most recent evaluation of the MYI program<sup>5</sup> found that the program has practically assisted participants with financial literacy. There is evidence that the MYI has made a contribution to up-skilling in the community and the bringing together of people into groups, is leading to sustainability in terms of leaders and groups having agency to enable positive change.

However, the outcomes that this project is achieving are broader than just finance. For example, longer term needs are being met in relation to housing and employment; hence this is the 'manage your life' aspect or impact of the program.

The program has been able to appropriately 'refer in' service providers and has developed an extensive network of formal and informal partnerships with service providers. The program takes a collaborative approach with service providers, establishing the bridge that A&TSI participants need to access a service.

The program undertakes, and is greatly valued for, appropriate community engagement. It defines needs and designs an appropriate response, in negotiation with community. It is evident that this ground-up approach has led to the success of the project in being appropriate, responsive and practical. The program also supports people to develop the skills, knowledge and networks to access services and to proactively deal with their financial issues themselves.

The work undertaken by team members in engaging with the community is strongly valued and emphasized as an important skill needed in recruiting staff. There are now five indigenous and one non-Indigenous team members in the MYI team, including one team member that sits within another organisation that is supported by the Aboriginal Program Manager. Five are accredited financial counsellors, one is undertaking training to achieve this qualification and one is employed as a Money Management Worker. The team is strong, diverse and cohesive, with different skills and experience. A key aspect to their competency is that they relate to and are respected in, the communities in which they work. There is investment in training and in support for staff. One of the aspects of the team that has led to the program's success is that the staff are not only A&TSI people but are also dedicated to working proactively in their own community. Further, the management at CentaCare have an appreciation of and commitment to Indigenous-led programs, with the extra support required to effectively enable this approach.

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<sup>5</sup> Moxham, N. 2011 Manage Your Income Manage Your Life Project Evaluation

CentaCare has recently introduced an internal monitoring and evaluation system that has overhauled data collection and reporting. This is a step in the direction of having better data available to make program decisions for improvement.

### **Challenges**

Each project brings with it a number of unique challenges which require a great degree of cultural sensitivity and knowledge to deal with them appropriately. The key challenges of the MYI have been described as follows:

- a. The key participants experience a significant degree of poverty. This along with extremely high cost of living, in terms of both food and services, in isolated communities means that it is difficult to teach people to budget when they have little money.
- b. Services do not always work together and there are factions. Services in some towns are duplicated, not coordinated or collaborative and not listening to people.
- c. It is a challenge to work with people who may appear to be indifferent and have low standards of literacy.
- d. It can be a challenge knowing how to adequately support Community Mentors. Some mentors do not want to be defined as a mentor.
- e. There are great distances between staff and communities which can be difficult in terms of implementing the program and presents challenges for the Program Manager trying to manage and support the team.
- f. Some team members may have many of the issues that the participants have and have to be there for their own families as well as for clients.
- g. It can be a challenge to recruit the right team members and to retain them long-term.
- h. Capturing the impact of the program can be a challenge. The varied nature of the program's success makes it difficult to capture (measure & evaluate) the impact and successes in a systematic way whilst adequately describing the complexities involved.

### **Key principles that made this project effective**

The following principles have been identified<sup>6</sup> as the main reason for the project's success:

- a. Design of the project for and by A&TSI people and along community-development principles.
- b. Up-skilling and capacity building of A&TSI participants, resulting in a self-determining resource.
- c. Inclusion of a train the trainer model.
- d. Employment of local A&TSI staff who can appropriately engage with the community.
- e. Investment in building staff capacity who are then able to lead the program.
- f. Promotion of a collaborative approach with service providers and linking of participants into other services.
- g. Long-term engagement by implementing organisation.
- h. Long-term partnership between the implementing organisation and the funding body. This includes a partnership of strong personal relationships, shared values and principles, openness, trust, transparency and honesty.
- i. Appropriate community engagement with time taken to build a trusting relationship with the community. Community is listened to, to allow the implementing organisation to respond accordingly and as appropriate with innovation. Programs are practical.
- j. A level of flexibility in the program to enable ground up responses.
- k. Flexible funding with a level of reflection to allow for innovation and the opportunity to make some mistakes.
- l. Regular and hands-on monitoring by funding body staff as well as an internal monitoring system used by implementing organisation to allow for informed decisions about changes to the program.
- m. An implementing organisation that is committed to Indigenous-led development and an organisational ethos that understands that non-Indigenous people do not have the answers.
- n. Knowing when to exit.

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<sup>6</sup> Described as the Elements of Success in Manage Your Income Manage Your Life Project Evaluation by Natalie Moxham 2011

**Note:**

This case study has been summarised and adapted from:

1. *Partnerships for Indigenous Development: International Development NGOs, Aboriginal Organisations and Communities* Working Paper No. 71/2010 Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research by Janet Hunt 2010
2. *Manage Your Income Manage Your Life Project Evaluation* by Natalie Moxham 2011.

### 1.3. Central Land Council – The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust Project

#### Project Background

The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) Project is one of six major regional projects managed by the Community Development Unit (CDU) of the Central Land Council (CLC).

The WETT project which was set up in 2004 supports education and training initiatives in the Warlpiri communities of Yuendumu, Lajamanu, Willowra and Nyirripi. The project has a range of subprograms, including the Early Childhood Care and Development Program, the Youth and Media Program, the Secondary School Support Program, the Language and Culture Support Program and the Learning Community Centre Program. All of these programs are operating in each of the four Warlpiri communities with the exception of the Learning Community Centre Program which is currently operating in Nyirripi, Willowra and Lajamanu with plans currently being developed for a WETT Learning Community Centre in Yuendumu.

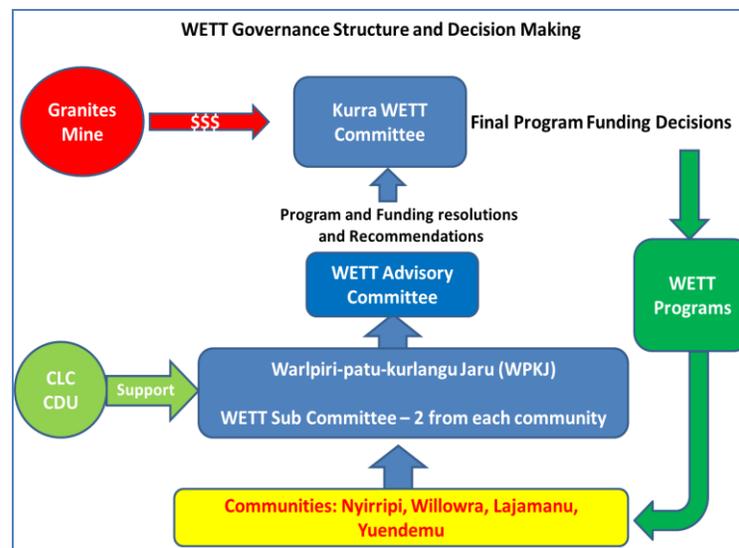
The WETT project and its subprograms came about through a collaborative community consultation with Warlpiri regarding their aspirations. It included external input from an education expert on what might be possible and valuable, information which the Warlpiri then considered and used to decide what would be implemented.

The WETT project uses royalties from Newmont Asia Pacific's mining operations in the Tanami region. This supports a high degree of flexibility of funds. The Trustee for the fund is the Kurra Aboriginal Corporation<sup>7</sup> (Kurra), and WETT is administered by the CLC under a formal Agency Agreement.

#### Project implementation

The WETT project provides learning and training opportunities for all Warlpiri from early childhood to adults and is intended to supplement but not replace core government education and training programs.

The CLC consults Warlpiri to identify their education and training priorities and then facilitates the development of programs with input from relevant project partners. These projects are considered and further developed by the WETT Advisory Committee, which includes 12 representatives from the Warlpiri-patu-kurlangu Jaru Association (WpkJ – the peak Warlpiri education body), and one representative each from the CLC and Newmont, and three independent members with education expertise. Projects are then recommended to Kurra which decides on funding.



<sup>7</sup> Body of Warlpiri who are the Traditional Owners for the land upon which the Granites and Dead Bullock Soak Gold mines are located.

The programs offer a range of activities depending on the needs identified by each community. For example, WETT supports interstate school excursions; cultural excursions involving Elders; literacy programs such as locally produced Warlpiri Books for schools; early childhood programs including playgroups and parenting support; a broad range of youth diversionary and training programs; youth media programs; and a variety of courses for adults including computers, sewing and ranger training.

The CLC's CDU uses a broad range of communication tools and strategies to promote an understanding of the WETT project and governance arrangements amongst the Warlpiri communities. One of the most effective of these is the WETT DVD that was produced by Warlpiri community members in Warlpiri language with English subtitles as part of the WETT Youth and Media Program. This has assisted people to 'see' WETT, not just hear about it, which has significantly increased the Warlpiri understanding of the project. A second WETT DVD updating project outcomes was produced by participants of the Youth and Media program in 2011. Posters are produced for community meetings which include photos and feedback on funded projects, and a list of key decisions to be made.

The CLC is seeking to build an evidence base for its community development approach and its contribution to capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) peoples and as such the WETT project is monitored on an annual basis by an external consultant drawing on independent interviews with local participants, staff reports and project partner reports. Other successes and challenges have also been documented and presented at academic seminars and published externally.

### **Partnership**

There are certain activities that are outside of the CLC's statutory functions. When project proposals for these kinds of activities are finalised, the CLC seeks partnerships with appropriate agencies to manage project implementation. Partnering agencies need to be well governed, operate within a community development approach and have good organisational capacity. Partnerships with such agencies have generally achieved sustained project benefits.

An example includes a successful partnership with the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) to manage funds from WETT for activities in the Tanami region for young people, including diversionary, education, training and employment opportunities. This success is largely due to the strong emphasis on Warlpiri involvement and decision-making in all aspects of the work. Conversely, where there is no agency that meets these criteria to take on project management, the 'choice' for landowners is either suboptimal project management and outcomes, or no project at all.

### **Successes**

The most recent monitoring report of the WETT project<sup>8</sup> indicates positive effects of capacity development of the WpkJ WETT Committee and the Kurra WETT Committee members resulting in meaningful local involvement in all levels of decision-making. Members of the WpkJ WETT Subcommittee were very clear that through their engagement with WETT they had learned how to manage meetings, in particular how to speak up, how to listen carefully and thoroughly consider all relevant information and its implications before making decisions. The most important message from respondents was about their increased confidence through engagement with the WETT committees.

According to the same monitoring report, the WETT project continues to receive strong support from all four communities. Active community participation in setting priorities and in decision-making has contributed to these positive outcomes.

Advocacy with external bodies that has occurred in collaboration with a number of partner organisations has been an important aspect of the WETT project. For example WpkJ WETT Subcommittee members with the CLC and World Vision Australia, successfully lobbied the Commonwealth Government for funding of \$1.3 million over three years to run three community

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<sup>8</sup> Central Land Council – 2012 Report on the Central Land Council Community Development Program prepared by Dr Linda Kelly, Praxis Consultants and published by the Central Land Council in June 2013.

learning centres. Further 17 Early Childhood trainees and WpkJ WETT sub-committee members advocated for the need for early childhood programs in the Warlpiri communities at a Child Care conference in Alice Springs.

The report also found that community leaders are progressively feeling increased ownership of the WETT Projects. In a community meeting CDU staff attended at Yuendumu, a WETT Committee member spoke passionately and at length on the virtues of WETT and the real difference it is making to people's lives.

The small group of Warlpiri women who have been centrally involved in the WETT Project are clearly committed to the notion of broad community benefit and creating opportunities for all Warlpiri in education and training. Whenever they present on WETT at community meetings or other public forums they make clear that they are not working for themselves or benefitting from WETT directly, rather they are doing it for all Warlpiri. In 2013 three WpkJ WETT Subcommittee members painted a large and intricate canvas (see below) as a tool to tell the story of WETT's history, governance and the development of WETT partnerships and programs. The determination of these women, most of whom are school teachers and strong community leaders, to make life better for their kids and grandkids has been critical to WETT's success to date.



## Challenges

Constant changes in government policies are creating significant challenges for the WETT project and other community development programs implemented by the CDU. The NT Government withdrew support for bilingual education in primary schools in 2008 and instead prioritized English language teaching. WETT has funded a range of Warlpiri language-based initiatives and resources which are no longer consistent with departmental policy. It is now increasingly difficult to get schools to factor them into the curriculum in the way Warlpiri people wish.

In another example, Government's decision to provide comprehensive support to a small number of communities in the CLC region and limit support to the majority of smaller communities has made it

increasingly difficult for the CLC to leverage complementary government funding for projects in small communities and outstations.

The Australian Government's 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response saw the Federal Government take control over many aspects of A&STI people's lives and communities. The large and complex changes created an environment of confusion and mistrust, further disempowering and marginalizing A&STI people. This has created significant challenges for community development approaches that run counter to the prevailing environment of increasing external control.

Other challenges include the poor capacity of some implementing partners which can divert the energies of CDU staff as well as the ongoing unrest and division in some communities. Their experience suggests that partnering with other local A&STI organisations is preferable to working with external agencies that do not have local A&STI governance. A&STI organisations have access to senior community people through their boards and committees, which facilitates organisations' engagement in those committees and they are more accountable to A&STI people. At the same time, some of these organisations, such as sporting clubs, do not necessarily have the experience and skills to manage the funds they receive.

### **Key principles that made this project effective**

The following key principles of effective development practice, which are central to the CLC Community Development Unit's approach, have been critical in the success of the WETT project.

- a. Project developed through a collaborative community consultation with local communities regarding their aspirations.
- b. Participants play an integral part in developing all aspects of the project and make all funding decisions for the project.
- c. Programs are practical and requested by local people.
- d. Use of participatory processes throughout the life cycle of the project to ensure an increasing level of ownership by participants and strong support for the project.
- e. Development of strong partnerships to deliver the project. Partnering agencies are well governed, operate within a community development approach and have good organizational capacity.
- f. Capacity development of governance and decision-making bodies resulting in a self-determining resource.
- g. Support of a project that is paid for by royalty money allowing for better flexibility.
- h. Support of advocacy initiatives in collaboration with a number of partner organisations which to date has led to increased funds and general awareness.
- i. Use of a broad range of communication tools and strategies to promote understanding of the project e.g. DVDs made by program participants and posters. Involvement of participants in the development of the communication tools.
- j. Long-term engagement and funding.
- k. Involvement of a significant number of local staff and community Elders in the programs.
- l. The development of project activities in a culturally appropriate manner.
- m. Building of an evidence base regarding the community development approach used allowing for reflection on successes and challenges and the ability to make informed changes as required. The implementing body does not presume to have all of the answers and is prepared to learn from mistakes and challenges and share these learnings with other practitioners.

#### **Note:**

This case study has been summarised and adapted from:

1. Central Land Council – *2012 Report on the Central Land Council Community Development Program* prepared by Dr Linda Kelly, Praxis Consultants and published by the Central Land Council in June 2013.
2. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research - *Community Development in Central Australia: Broadening the Benefits from Land Use Agreements* written by Danielle Campbell and Janet Hunt CAEPR Topical Issue No. 07/2010 and presented at a CAEPR Seminar on 20 October 2010.
3. Central Land Council DVDs – *WETT 2009 & 2011*.
4. Central Land Council DVD – *Community Development Our Money Our Projects 2013*.

## 2. TOOLS

### 2.1. Caritas Australia – Organic approach to design

A programming technique used by Caritas Australia is the organic approach to project design which is seen as an alternative to the log-frame type design. The organic approach recognises that the environment can be complex and at times chaotic and that a method which is more organic and incremental than linear and predictable is required. As such this approach to design, if undertaken appropriately, can lend itself quite well to organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) communities.

Caritas Australia has been developing this approach to program design for many years and it has now been piloted and in some cases incorporated in the Philippines, in the Pacific and in A&TSI Australia. Caritas's First Australians Program partners find that this approach is easily accessible and they particularly like its ability to adapt to changing circumstances throughout the life of a project.

'Organic' is a term that is used to describe an approach or 'a way of thinking' to designing and managing projects/programs. The key characteristics of this approach are flexibility, an openness to change, a focus on learning and adaptation.

The organic approach focuses on working with partners and communities to identify changes that they seek - rather than identifying their needs – and how this can be achieved. It is an approach that promotes learning and adaptation and which enables project implementers to build on what is working, and change strategies that do not. The strong learning focus of the organic approach to design, allows for changes to the design during the life of the project.

As the project progresses the implementers learn more about what works and how change happens and they also learn more about the context and the relationships where they are working. All this contributes to improved ability to manage and work towards the required long term result. Information for this process comes in part from monitoring. Monitoring is a very important part of the project design plan and needs to be undertaken on a regular basis. The monitoring aspect of this approach gives strong attention to the changes that are occurring in a project through a reflection process.

A review of Caritas Australia's organic approach used in two projects in the Philippines, one of which involved Indigenous peoples, found that the approach is very appropriate to complex situations such as those of the Indigenous peoples, where there may be a lot of unknown and unpredictable variables.

The review also found that if the approach is applied well, and the implementing partners have good capacity to manage and facilitate the change process, it can result in:

- Strong local ownership of the long-term change;
- Strong participation of communities/project participants;
- Highly relevant project design;
- Achievement, capturing and documentation of real change ;
- Improved monitoring & evaluation; and
- Improved effectiveness and sustainability.

#### **Advice**

Caritas Australia recommends that anyone using this approach should start small and grow the project organically by building on successes. Staff consider that this approach involves some level of risks. It is a process that can require a long-term commitment and initially one which sees few indications of success. It therefore requires support from organisational leaders in order for it to be adopted. However, experience has shown that the organic approach is more likely to have better and more sustainable results.

Caritas also notes that it assumes good analytical and facilitation skills from staff and partners to undertake regular monitoring and reflection processes. It also needs the flexibility and space to acknowledge both failure and success and to learn from both.

This approach is based on a notion that adopting more flexible approaches to program design, and more engagement with partners and communities, not only in the design process but also in monitoring, reflection and adaptation, is a key component in making communities more central to the development process.<sup>9</sup>

For further information about the organic approach, contact the Group Leader, Program Effectiveness, Accountability and Learning, Caritas Australia.

## 2.2. Most Significant Change (MSC) – a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Technique

### Background

Most Significant Change or MSC<sup>10</sup> has become a well known technique within the development sector. It is well suited to environments where the worldview of community members and program managers differ, as it uses and reports on the voices of those who are directly impacted.

MSC is a tool for monitoring, evaluation and organisational learning. It is a qualitative and participatory technique involving the ongoing collection of stories of significant change.

Essentially it uses storytelling as a means of capturing community views of broader impact including unintended impacts. The technique involves many project stakeholders in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. It occurs throughout the program cycle and provides information to help people manage the program as well as data on impact and outcomes of the program as a whole.

The option is not just about collecting and reporting stories but about having processes to learn from these stories – in particular, to learn about the similarities and differences in what different groups and individuals value.

While it gives some ideas of impact and unintended impact, it is not by itself sufficient for impact evaluation as it does not provide information about the usual experience but about the best. It can be very helpful in explaining HOW change comes about (processes and causal mechanisms) and WHEN (in what situations and contexts).

The Most Significant Change technique is well suited to environments where the worldview of community members and program managers differ, as it uses and reports on the voices of those who are directly impacted.

### Advice<sup>11</sup>

- This option is not just about collecting stories for promotional purposes, it is about a project or program learning over time.
- Triangulation: It is not usually appropriate to use MSC on its own in an evaluation. This is because MSC describes the extremities of individual outcomes which will give some clues about their impact (intended and unintended) whereas evaluations usually need more than this to make judgments about outcomes of a program.
- Resources: MSC takes time and resources to develop understanding and to identify what people think is important. It also takes time to gain agreement from all the relevant stakeholders who need to be involved in the process.
- Other Skills Necessary: Good facilitation skills with the ability to identify priorities.

<sup>9</sup> Roche, C. 2009. Promoting Voice and Choice Exploring Innovations in Australian NGO Accountability for Development Effectiveness Prepared for ACFID, November 2009 at <http://bigpushforward.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/roche-promoting-voice1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Davies, R. and Dart, J. 2005. The 'Most Significant Change' Technique (MSC). A Guide to its Use. At <http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf> (viewed 13.2.14)

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from [http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/most\\_significant\\_change](http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/most_significant_change) Web (viewed 13.2.14)

### 3. RESOURCES

#### 3.1. Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) – Partnership Principles

In 2013 a range of peak Northern Territory Aboriginal organisations<sup>12</sup> collaborated with local, national and international NGOs's to develop a set of Partnership Principles entitled *Principles for a partnership-centred approach for NGOs working in Aboriginal organisations and communities in the Northern Territory*.

Prior to its official launch in October 2013, the finalised principles were circulated to mainstream NGOs, including INGOs, for endorsement. To date, 17 mainstream NGOs, including INGOs have endorsed the principles.

APONT are encouraging mainstream NGOs, including INGOs operating in the Northern Territory to endorse the Partnership Principles if they have not already done so.

The next stage of work on the Partnership Principles will provide examples of good partnership practice and allow for a more detailed understanding of the practical application of the NGO Partnership Principles.

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<sup>12</sup> Including APONT, itself an alliance of peak A&TSI organisations in the NT, Strong Aboriginal Families, Together (SAF,T) and National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

## Principles for a partnership-centred approach for NGOs working with Aboriginal organisations and communities in the Northern Territory

### Purpose

These Principles are designed to guide the development of a partnership-centred approach for non-Aboriginal NGOs engaging in the delivery of services or development initiatives in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

### Objective

Development of these Principles is underpinned by the strong aspiration of Aboriginal community controlled peak organisations in the NT to work with and secure the support of non-Aboriginal NGOs towards the essential goal of strengthening and rebuilding an Aboriginal controlled development and service sector in the NT. It is about putting Aboriginal people back in the driver's seat.

### Context

These Principles embody the spirit and substance of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). They have been developed through an understanding that a fundamental shift is required in policy approaches towards Aboriginal communities from a narrow service delivery focus to one based on a development approach. It is understood that to be effective, these Principles require a corresponding commitment from government to provide an enabling environment to properly support and resource action under the Principles.

### The Principles

In supporting these Principles, non-Aboriginal NGOs agree to undertake to:

- 1. Consider their own capacity:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs shall objectively assess whether they have the capacity (either in service delivery or development practice) to deliver effective and sustainable outcomes in the NT context.
- 2. Recognise existing capacity:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs will recognise the existing capacity and particular strengths of Aboriginal NGOs and identify how they can contribute to further developing this capacity.
- 3. Research existing options:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs shall thoroughly research existing Aboriginal service providers and development agencies before applying for service delivery contracts or prior to considering community development projects.<sup>1</sup>
- 4. Seek partnerships:** Where there is an Aboriginal NGO willing and able to provide a service or development activity, non-Aboriginal NGOs shall not directly compete with the Aboriginal service provider, but will seek, where appropriate, to develop a partnership in accord with these principles.
- 5. Approach to partnership:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs will be guided by the priorities of the Aboriginal NGO in developing a partnership. Partnerships will be based on building and

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<sup>1</sup> APO NT should be contacted for advice where there appears to be no relevant Aboriginal organisation/s providing services or undertaking development work. <http://www.apont.org.au>

strengthening, rather than displacing, Aboriginal organisational capacity and control. Processes for developing partnerships will need to recognise the inherent power imbalance between large NGOs and small Aboriginal organisations, and will need to allow sufficient time for partnership development.

6. **Recognise, support and promote existing development practice:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs acknowledge that many Aboriginal organisations already have robust and effective development practices embedded in a cultural framework, although some of this may be implicit and undocumented. Non-Aboriginal NGOs agree to recognise and support these practices, including through partnership arrangements.
7. **Work together with Aboriginal people to create strong and viable Aboriginal organisations:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs recognise Aboriginal organisations and communities as lead agents in creating sustainable governance and leadership in Aboriginal communities in the NT, and agree to work within structures and processes that provide Aboriginal decision-making control. This may require formal delegation of power and the dedication of self-generated resources to assist with this process.
8. **Ensure Aboriginal control, not just consultation:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs agree that Aboriginal organisations need to be in the 'driver's seat' and have control of development initiatives, services and programs delivered to their communities. This should include having input to decisions regarding resource allocations and staffing.
9. **Develop a clear exit strategy:** Where the desired outcome is for local Aboriginal organisations to deliver services or provide a development role, non-Aboriginal NGOs will develop a mutually agreed, transparent exit strategy in consultation with their partners. Contracts with government should incorporate a succession plan and long term planning for local Aboriginal organisations to deliver services, with appropriate resourcing included.
10. **Ensure robust evaluation and accountability:** Non-Aboriginal NGOs will develop a robust accountability framework and evaluation process together with partner Aboriginal organisations and communities.
11. **Cultural competency and appropriate development practice:** Aboriginal organisations and non-Aboriginal NGOs will seek to work together to share learnings and establish effective development practice and cultural competency standards for development projects and service delivery initiatives.



## About these Principles

These Principles were developed through a collaborative process led by Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT), Strong Aboriginal Families, Together (SAF,T), National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, ACOSS and NTCOSS, with input from a forum in February 2013 that brought together twenty seven non-Aboriginal NGOs with Aboriginal peak organisations. For further information see <http://www.apont.org.au>

## 4. LITERATURE

There are a number of useful documents which can guide INGOs and other interested organisations, working in Indigenous Development within Australia. Some of the key documents are suggested below.

APONT, 2012. *Principles for a Partnership Centred Approach for NGOs Working with Aboriginal Organisations and Communities in the Northern Territory* at

<http://apont.org.au/attachments/article/72/210313%20-20Principles%20for%20NGOs%20-%20Final.pdf> (viewed 4 November, 2013)

Australian Government and World Vision, *Memorandum of Understanding on Indigenous Development Effectiveness, 2102-2017* at

<http://www.dss.gov.au/memorandum-of-understanding-on-indigenous-development-effectiveness-2012-17> (viewed 7 October, 2013)

Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010 *Community Guide to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/community-guide-un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples> Web (viewed 10.2.14)

Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011. *Social Justice Report 2011*. Ch 4. at

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[http://www.cgris.gov.au/site/CGRIS\\_Biannual\\_Report\\_March\\_2011.asp](http://www.cgris.gov.au/site/CGRIS_Biannual_Report_March_2011.asp)

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CGRIS, 2012. Roundtable on the Role of NGOs in Integrated Service Delivery hosted by the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services in Adelaide on 27 July 2012. *Proposed Draft Guiding Principles*. At <http://www.cgris.gov.au/site/ngo-workshop.asp> (Viewed 20 December, 2013)

Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (AIHW, AIFS) 2013. *Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Annual Reports 2011-2012; 2012-2013*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies. At

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2013/16317.pdf>  
(Viewed 12 November 2013)

Corpus, G. and Moran, M. (2013) *Adapting Development Practice to Indigenous Contexts*, presented at the fourth ACFID University Network conference

Hutchins, T. and Moran, M. 2010. *Not Another Service Provider. Partnering for Sustainability*. World Vision Annual Program Review 2010. Web at  
<http://www.worldvision.com.au/resources/ReportsResearchPublications/AnnualProgramReview.aspx>  
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<https://griffithreview.com/edition-36-what-is-australia-for/kartiya-are-like-toyotas> (Viewed 10 December, 2103)

Queensland Council of Social Service VOICE *Developing a Culturally Competent Organisation*  
Queensland Council of Social Service at  
<http://www.communitydoor.org.au/documents/VOICE/pplusingservice/topicguide/DevelCulturallyCompetentOrg.rtf> (Viewed 20 January, 2014)

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