

# PART III

## REGIONAL STUDIES

## The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme

### Abstract for Part III: Regional studies

The purpose of this section is to present some case studies of the CDEP scheme in operation in rural and regional Australia.

The section consists of six papers presented at a conference. The first reflects on mutual obligation, the CDEP scheme and development prospects in remote Australia. The following five papers present different perspectives on the CDEP scheme, with particular reference to the following areas or communities: Torres Strait, Port Augusta (South Australia), Yuendumu and Western Arrente communities in central Australia and Worn Gundidj in Victoria.

#### *Keywords*

apprenticeship, Centrelink, economy, employment, income, Job Network, management, mutual obligation, remote communities, remote regions, resources, social organisation, tourism, traineeship, unsubsidised employment, work programs, youth

# 13. 'Mutual obligation', the CDEP scheme, and development: Prospects in remote Australia<sup>1</sup>

**Jon Altman**

## Introduction

Many observers feel that current social policy, and particularly the payment of welfare to the unemployed, needs to be fundamentally rethought. It is notable that advocates of change include both the government-appointed McClure Committee and influential Indigenous spokespersons, most notably Noel Pearson. In their publications *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society* (McClure 2000) and *Our Right to Take Responsibility* (Pearson 2000b) both these parties adopt the language of mutual obligation and, on the face of it, appear to agree with the general principle. The central tenet of mutual obligation in the context of current debates is the problem of how to shift individuals from being 'passive' welfare dependents into active engagement with the 'real' economy. The model is predicated on the forging of new partnerships between governments, business, the community, and the individual.

Both the McClure Committee and Pearson recognise that many Indigenous communities face major structural and systemic barriers to full economic participation, particularly in rural and remote regions. Both only make passing reference to the CDEP scheme that was first established in 1977 as Australia's prototype mutual obligation program. While the wages component of the scheme is covered by notional welfare equivalent payments, additional amounts are also provided with which to administer the scheme and purchase capital equipment. At 1 July 2000, there were nearly 31 000 participants in the scheme across Australia.<sup>2</sup> The CDEP scheme, as a model, meets many of the principles of mutual obligation as enunciated by McClure and Pearson as well as by academics like Yeatman (1999) and Saunders (see Ch. 3, this volume).<sup>3</sup>

In the discussion that follows, I first define the boundaries of remote Australia, noting that about 70 per cent of the 265 CDEPs that existed at the time of the 1996 Census fall within this jurisdiction. On the basis of joint research with Matthew Gray (Altman & Gray 2000), I then provide a very brief assessment of the economic impact of the CDEP scheme in this region. McClure's and Pearson's prescriptions for facilitating Indigenous engagement with the 'real' economy are then examined and subjected to some reality checks; and finally I set out my own views on how the CDEP scheme, with modification, could be used as an institutional framework for Indigenous economic development.

## Defining 'remote' Australia

The remote regions of Australia are those where mainstream economic opportunities are most limited and where the CDEP scheme is most prominent. They constitute what is without doubt the most problematic economic development extreme. In a paper written a decade ago (Altman 1990), remote Indigenous communities were typified as having extremely limited capacity to generate income independent of government. Such communities have come into being historically because of their very remoteness.<sup>4</sup> This in turn is the reason for their current under-development: they have poor resource endowments and poor market linkage. This generalisation has exceptions: major mineral deposits can provide development opportunities based on exploitation of non-renewable resources, and remoteness can be an advantage for tourism enterprises and cultural industries. With globalisation, improved transport links, and electronic communication, remoteness need no longer be a major barrier to effective market linkage.

Official statistics on CDEP scheme participation are rare; indeed it was only in the 1996 Census that the ABS started asking a question specifically about CDEP employment. It so happens that this question was only asked in nominated discrete communities, almost all of which are located in remote areas, although a few exist in, or near, towns and cities. These required specialised enumeration procedures because of their geographic isolation and/or the extent of their cultural or language difference from mainstream Australia.<sup>5</sup>

The 'specialised' enumeration strategy (SES) was used for an Indigenous population of 72 229, or 20 per cent of the total Indigenous population in 1996. There is a high degree of CDEP scheme participation in this statistical region, as shown by Altman and Gray (2000). At the time of the 1996 Census, there were 265 CDEP schemes, and it is estimated that 183 of these (69 per cent) were in Indigenous Local Areas (ILOCs) where the SES was used. All told, the 1996 Census found 10 948 CDEP-employed Indigenous persons in these areas, nearly 60 per cent of the Indigenous people estimated to be employed by CDEP in 1996. In these remote areas, CDEP employment also coincidentally accounted for 60 per cent of all Indigenous employment, with only 7247 Indigenous people employed outside the CDEP scheme.

The analysis here focuses on the 236 (out of 934) ILOCs where the SES was used. The reasons for this focus are that it is only at these ILOCs that data on CDEP participation are readily available. It also happens to be the case that CDEP is the primary form of employment in these areas: these ILOCs are the remotest from markets, at the difficult extreme in terms of engagement with the mainstream economy; and they demonstrate the highest level of cultural continuity, as measured by imprecise variables like 'cultural or language differences'.

## Economic impacts of the CDEP scheme

If the CDEP scheme is characterised as a 'mutual obligation' institutional framework, the question can then be posed: how well does it operate in practice? Statistical analysis that can be undertaken for the first time, because of the data in the 1996 Census, indicates that it operates quite well. Some key findings from Altman and Gray (2000) are summarised below.

### **Effects on personal weekly income**

Indications are that the mean income of the CDEP-employed is substantially higher than that of the unemployed or those not in the labour force. For example, CDEP-employed males and females receive a mean income of \$186 and \$181 per week respectively, compared to \$139 and \$145 received by unemployed males and females. The income of CDEP-employed people is much lower than the mean income of \$298 and \$299 received by Indigenous males and females in mainstream employment (Altman & Gray 2000: 8–10).

### **Effects of CDEP employment on hours worked**

The notional CDEP wages component only provides for part-time work, most commonly 18 hours a week. Indications from the 1996 Census are that people who are CDEP-employed are frequently able to supplement these hours, with 17 per cent of males and 16 per cent of females working between 25 and 34 hours per week and a significant minority (26 per cent of males and 18 per cent of females) working more than 35 hours per week, or full-time. These additional hours of work can be accrued in a variety of ways: from 'top-up' hours provided by the CDEP organisation, from extra work generated by enterprises, or by combining CDEP employment with part-time mainstream employment (Altman & Gray 2000: 10).

### **Effects of CDEP employment on labour force status**

By combining ATSI administrative data with census data, it is possible to compare CDEP with non-CDEP communities in rural and remote areas.<sup>6</sup> The employment to population ratio, at 50 per cent, is higher in CDEP communities than non-CDEP communities, where it is 38 per cent. This is hardly surprising since recruitment to CDEP entails an immediate change of labour force status. However, in addition, it seems that many of the CDEP-employed are drawn from those groups who otherwise would not be in the labour force. The 'not in the labour force' ratio is 44 per cent at CDEP communities, but 50 per cent in non-CDEP communities. The unemployment rate is remarkably similar in CDEP and non-CDEP communities in rural and remote areas, at 10.5 per cent and 13 per cent respectively (Altman & Gray 2000: 13–14). This indicates that passive welfare exists alongside 'active' welfare in CDEP communities.

These statistics indicate that the CDEP scheme is doing some things right: income is increased, extra hours of work are generated, and labour force status is improved. The obvious proviso is that this is being assisted by allocations of operational and capital support from ATSI. Two important issues arise. Although people who are CDEP-employed are not welfare dependent, they remain dependent nevertheless on a government program. Indeed many individuals have participated in the scheme for over a decade. The second, related, issue is whether participants are moving through the scheme to mainstream employment.

## The McClure and Pearson strategies

McClure and Pearson address the need for reform of the Australian social security system in very different ways. McClure has an Australia-wide focus and is greatly influenced by global welfare debates; Pearson is specifically focused on the Aboriginal communities of Cape York Peninsula. Both analyses have significant limitations when it comes to providing practical policy advice about contexts which are largely devoid of economic opportunity.

McClure's discussion of such situations is largely limited to a brief section titled 'Community Economic Development' (2000: 47–8). There is some mention here of a model devised in the UK to generate economic participation opportunities in disadvantaged regions (typically those where industry might have existed historically, but has now departed). McClure notes that 'in the model community development organisations are formed by local communities to provide a range of social and economic activities on a not for profit basis' (2000: 47). The description of such organisations resonates with the image of CDEP organisations, but these are not really discussed in any detail. Elsewhere, it is suggested that Rural Transactions Centres (RTCs) could be established to assist disadvantaged rural communities with access to financial and other services, including 'passive' welfare delivered by Centrelink. There is no doubt that RTCs could be useful, but they represent another new institutional arrangement. Similarly, reference is made to a new program called Regional Solutions that will provide grants 'for community planning, local project implementation, community adjustment initiatives, regionally based enterprise or infrastructure projects and community-based development officers' (McClure 2000: 48). The best-practice case for Indigenous employment comes from rural New South Wales where a partnership has been forged between Commonwealth and local governments and a cotton growers' association.

McClure completely fails to address the question of how new partnerships can be forged between governments, business, the community and the individual in situations where:

- business is non-existent;
- governmental activity is heavily embedded in community organisations;
- government is perceived as reneging on meeting legitimate needs-based support;
- individuals are heavily embedded in wider social networks and participation in those networks is not contingent on economic participation; and
- 'the community' is divided for a range of historical, cultural or political reasons (see Peters-Little, Ch. 19, this volume).

In seeking to address these problems—which go to the core of the reality faced by many Indigenous communities—one might turn to Pearson's strategies for economic development. However, in a 'four point plan for developing a real economy for Aboriginal society on Cape York Peninsula', Pearson too is light on practical, culturally-informed strategies. The key planks of his plan (Pearson 2000a: 83–92) are as follows:

- rejuvenation of the subsistence economy;

- replacement of all welfare programs with reciprocity programs, like the CDEP scheme;
- development of community economies, that is, generating employment for Indigenous people rather than non-Indigenous wherever possible; and
- engagement with the mainstream economy, which he recognises as the most difficult development aim to achieve.

Some comments are offered here in response to Pearson's proposals. The rejuvenation of the subsistence economy has occurred with some success elsewhere in remote Australia, especially on Aboriginal land (see Altman & Taylor 1989). Participation in this informal economy can be extremely important especially in improving diets and health and in generating non-monetary income. But there is, as yet, no evidence that it is associated with movement towards greater economic independence.

Replacement of all welfare programs with so-called reciprocity programs has already been tried in remote communities where, up until the late 1980s, the CDEP scheme was only introduced on an 'all-in' basis. While it is true that it is extremely difficult to operate a reciprocity program effectively alongside a passive welfare regime, again there is no evidence that reciprocity alone led to reduced dependence on government.

The development of community economies is of crucial importance, for if Indigenous people cannot fill locally available and scarce mainstream jobs how can engagement with the 'real' economy occur? But the growing technical and social demands of many service jobs in remote communities are in fact making them less appealing and less accessible to local people. The cultural persistence of distinctly Indigenous kin-based relations of production greatly dilute the rewards—as conventionally valued—of high-pressure employment. To some extent, it could be said that mutual obligation and reciprocity within the Indigenous domain is hampering economic participation.

And finally there is engagement with the mainstream economy outside the community, at regional, national, and international levels. When opportunities arise in mining, tourism, or cultural industries, where Indigenous people may have special leverage based on land rights or native title, or a clear competitive advantage, these should be grasped. But so often such opportunities are forgone because of political complexities at the community level, or an absence of appropriate development agencies, or for the cultural reasons referred to above. There is often a tension between community and individual engagement and a myriad of potential problematic groupings in between these two extremes.

To be fair to Pearson, his policy prescription is regionally focused on Cape York Aboriginal society and makes a great deal of intuitive sense.<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy, however, that his approach is little different from that advocated some 15 years ago by the Miller Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs (Miller 1985). It was the Miller Committee in particular that advocated strongly the need for the development of an economic base in remote Indigenous communities, and for 'localisation' of employment opportunities. Second, Pearson does not refer to other situations where this broad four-pronged approach has been vigorously pursued, such as nearby on the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula. There is some evidence there of improved economic status, albeit with limited evidence of reduced dependence on government.

## Using the CDEP scheme to engage in the 'real' economy

The key issue to be addressed is how the CDEP scheme can be better structured to meet diverse Indigenous economic development aspirations in a public policy environment that might focus increasingly on mutual obligation. Suggestions here are tailored for the broad circumstances of remote communities participating in the CDEP scheme and may not be suitable to CDEP scheme participants in other urban or rural circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

### Program strengths and weaknesses

An overarching strength of the CDEP scheme, as currently constituted, is its flexibility. It is at once an employment, training, community development and enterprise assistance program. At times it is just an income support mechanism, little different from welfare. The popularity of the scheme is evident in its spread across 290 communities Australia-wide, in very diverse circumstances. This flexibility is also a weakness, because while there is statistical evidence of success in employment and income generation, it is unclear how successful the scheme is in community development and training. This is partly because the latter are more difficult to measure, and partly because in many cases appropriate statistics do not exist. Because of the diversity of its program objectives, CDEP scheme performance is hard to measure and its success, where evident, is difficult to demonstrate.

In many situations CDEP organisations try to do too much, especially those that are successful. This is often because other community-based specialist agencies are non-existent, and as a result CDEP support provided by ATSIC sometimes substitutes for the programs that should be provided by other agencies. If CDEP organisations are to do the jobs of other agencies, be they DEWRSB, DETYA, Centrelink, or other Commonwealth or State agencies, it should be on a full cost-recovery basis (see comments in this volume by Bartlett, Ch. 20; Kean, Ch. 21; Nalliah, Ch. 28). Similarly, if CDEP organisations contract to undertake municipal services or operate as outstation resource agencies, this should be done on a commercial basis and be funded accordingly. There are existing best-practice examples of such approaches.

Ultimately, if CDEP organisations are to focus on employment and community economic development in the new social policy environment, it might be appropriate for the scheme's objectives to be amended and negotiated on a case-by-case basis. There are dangers inherent in pursuing too many diverse objectives.

### Transforming CDEP organisations into development agencies

As noted above, McClure (2000) provides few recommendations or solutions for the development problems of remote regions, beyond noting options for establishing community development institutions. Rather than establishing new and additional organisations, it would be far better to use an existing institutional model, the CDEP organisation, to deliver development opportunities at the community level. Rather than inventing new institutions from nothing, it would be more cost-effective to resource CDEP organisations to build their capacity to deliver development. Interestingly, Pearson (2000b) does not nominate CDEP organisations as the governance structures to facilitate



development, recommending instead larger regional agencies. More recently he has favoured direct relations between agencies and families and individuals (Pearson 2000a). Intermediary community-based organisations will undoubtedly be needed to facilitate development: the question is whether, as is argued here, CDEP organisations are the best placed to become development agencies.

The answer depends in part on resourcing. In some regions, ATSIC has provided organisations with triennial funding on preparation of development plans. This has allowed a degree of capital and operational funding commitment that has greatly assisted planning for development. A danger that some organisations face is that success might reduce discretionary capital funding; it is important that this does not occur and that funding decisions do not become politicised and biased against the successful.

An advantage of the CDEP as a development agency model is that CDEP organisations can be constituted in a way that separates trading activity from ATSIC-supported activity. This in turn means that trading profits—members' rather than public finance—can be invested in high-risk ventures.

To make the transition to their role as development agencies, CDEP organisations will require resourcing for board and member empowerment. In particular, there is a need for an additional injection of funds for training boards and for participatory planning. If CDEP organisations are to change into 'community economic development' organisations it is imperative that their growing complexity does not result in the alienation and disengagement of their members and over-reliance on non-Indigenous management. Such disengagement can result in organisational instability that is not conducive to sound business practice.

### **Maintaining the nexus with welfare financing, not welfare institutions**

There are mismatches between the CDEP scheme and mutual obligation, and a logical tension between welfare and CDEP regimes, especially when they are found in the same community. For example, as a general rule, CDEP combines high activity testing with almost no income testing. Paradoxically, New Start Allowance (unemployment benefit) in remote situations has almost no, or highly modified, activity testing.<sup>9</sup> Because its income test is so much more generous, CDEP provides positive signals to participants to supplement their incomes either in monetised or in non-monetised sectors, in a way that welfare does not.

It will be difficult to counteract the emerging fusion between CDEP and welfare institutions and the mixed signals that ensue. CDEP 'top up' provided by Centrelink to provide equity with the 'work for the dole' program should be provided to CDEP organisations to administer. The administratively-burdensome CDEPManager electronic database, and daily monitoring of CDEP participation (which far exceeds Centrelink monitoring of New Start Allowance clients), should be reconsidered: CDEP organisations should be allowed flexibility in differentiating types of participants and should be allowed use of wages surpluses for top up. Finally, to be effective and to encourage diversion from passive welfare, CDEP organisations should be provided with wages, capital, and operational

support budgets that are open-ended, bearing in mind that most cost (76 per cent according to 2000–01 estimates) will be nominally offset by welfare. A discussion of the means to make these funding changes falls outside the scope of this paper. Delivering development in remote Australia will not be cheap, but the utilisation of a scheme that has considerable welfare offset is a relatively cheap option for government.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The CDEP scheme is only one possible instigator of development in remote Indigenous Australia. But it represents an important, already existing framework by which to link strategically the social policy reform focus on ‘mutual obligation’ with economic development for remote Indigenous communities. If CDEP is to fulfil its potential, it is crucial to provide options to re-jig the scheme so that it can operate more effectively to facilitate ‘mainstream’ development in situations where participants aspire to such an outcome. To operate as effective development agencies, CDEP organisations also require funding to strengthen their institutions and build capacity.

Any community desire to distance ‘active’ mutual obligation CDEP from ‘passive’ welfare should be facilitated by government. The crucial objective of the CDEP scheme must be to incrementally improve the economic status of participants, to move economic indicators, however measured, in a positive direction and in accord with planned growth. The CDEP scheme will not deliver any immediate development solutions, but appropriately revamped it could be a part of a long-term ‘mutual obligation’ development strategy for many remote Indigenous communities.

## Notes

1. I thank Hilary Bek, Melinda Hinkson, Tim Rowse, and John Taylor for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
2. ATSIC differentiates funded places, participant ceilings, and actual participant numbers. At 1 July 2000 these were 33 188, 33 557 and 30 749 respectively. Allocations for CDEP in 2000–01 is divided into \$324 million for wages and \$102 million for operational (capital and on-costs), a total of \$426 million. The division of operational funding is decided by ATSIC Regional Councils.
3. In this paper, no real attempt is made to address the issue of what mutual obligation values might mean cross-culturally and what the diverse Indigenous conceptualisations of their relations with the state might be. This is an issue that has been canvassed very briefly elsewhere (Altman 2000).
4. Indigenous communities are notoriously difficult to define especially as they were invariably established in the process of colonisation. Today, communities may be geographic, social, cultural or administrative units, or combinations thereof. The standard view that a community encompasses a group of people who reside in one locality is problematic when applied to Indigenous people because they are highly

regionally mobile and frequently have multiple residential rights and social orientations (Altman 1990: 48).

5. In such situations enumeration was carried out by Indigenous interviewers using specially designed census forms including the Special Indigenous Personal Form (SIPF). Information on participation in the CDEP scheme was extracted from SIPFs (Altman & Gray 2000: 5–6).
6. This discussion of the impact on labour force status uses the standard census rural balance and locality classification rather than the SES jurisdiction used above.
7. Also, Pearson's treatise is largely about how to get passive welfare out of Aboriginal governance and the passive welfare mentality out of individuals. These issues are more in the realm of politics and psychology than economics. My focus here is primarily on the economic, but I recognise obvious linkages to the political and psychological.
8. My own case study research has focused on work with CDEP organisations like the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (see also Manners, Ch. 26, this volume) and the Djabulukgu Association in the Northern Territory. These are also outstation resource agencies.
9. Sanders' (1999) study provides some interesting statistics and discussion of regional variation in breach rates and causes.
10. The opportunity cost of inaction does not constitute a cheap option. This is clearly demonstrated by Taylor and Altman (1997).

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# 14. CDEP and careers: Some good news and some bad news from Torres Strait

**Bill Arthur**

## Introduction

Having been in place for around 25 years, the CDEP scheme is the longest standing government work program. It would be surprising therefore if people did not have some view of its possible role in their futures. A recent survey in Torres Strait shows that although communities appear to utilise CDEP to create employment and training opportunities young people feel that the scheme has limited potential to further their careers. This paper uses data from the survey to analyse the apparent contradiction between these 'good news' and 'bad news' stories and suggests what the implications may be for the future of the program.

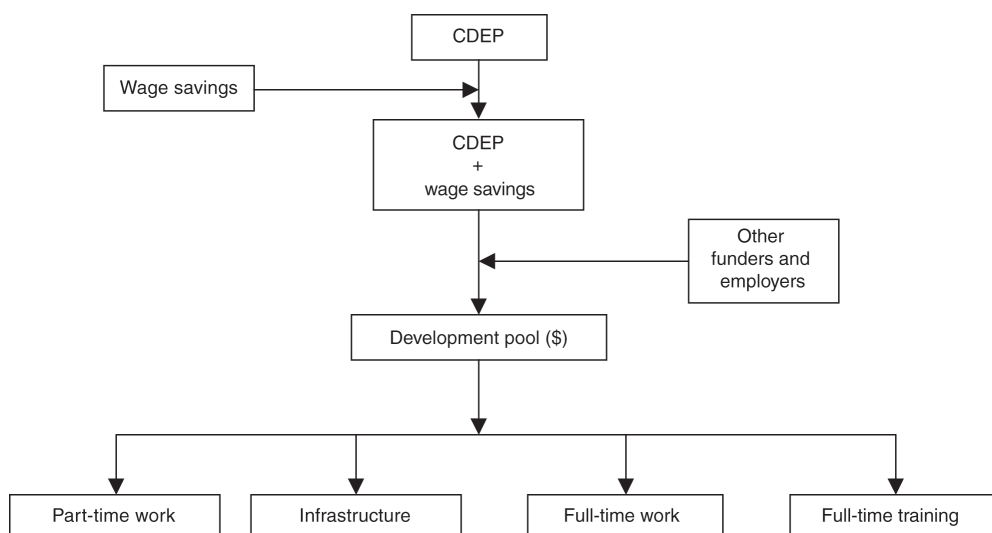
The data are taken from a survey carried out in Torres Strait of 105 young Torres Strait Islanders between the ages of 15 and 24. The major objective of the study is to determine the aspirations of young people and to discover if these coincide with the aims of the government's welfare programs, which are related to the labour market (see Arthur 1999; Arthur & David-Petero 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). Although the study is not centred on CDEP, the survey revealed information about it, as one of the major programs in the area. In Torres Strait, CDEP is managed individually by each island Community Council. At the time of the survey there were 17 of these CDEP schemes with a total of approximately 1700 participants.

Approximately half of those surveyed were males and half were females. Half lived in the regional centre of Thursday Island and half in a small community on an outlying island. People in the survey were employed in the non-CDEP sector, employed in the CDEP sector, unemployed, or still at secondary school. Therefore, the data reflect the opinions of a fairly broad range of young people.

## The general pattern of the CDEP

The principal elements of a CDEP scheme in Torres Strait are laid out, in a very general way, in Fig. 14.1. We can think of these elements as forming inputs and outputs. The inputs are the standard CDEP funding, any wage savings the council is able to make, and funds from other funders and employers. Other funders can include the community school, the child-care centre, the council office and health clinic, and the State and Commonwealth governments. These other funders and employers may provide part of a full-time wage for an employee, trainee or apprentice, with the CDEP providing the other part of the wage. Councils tend to see all of these funds as forming a development pot which they can use for various purposes, or outputs. Under a 'no work, no pay' rule, wage savings occur when people decide not to turn up for CDEP. This is easily managed by using a time clock and getting people to clock on and off.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 14.1 A generalised picture of CDEP, Torres Strait, 1999**



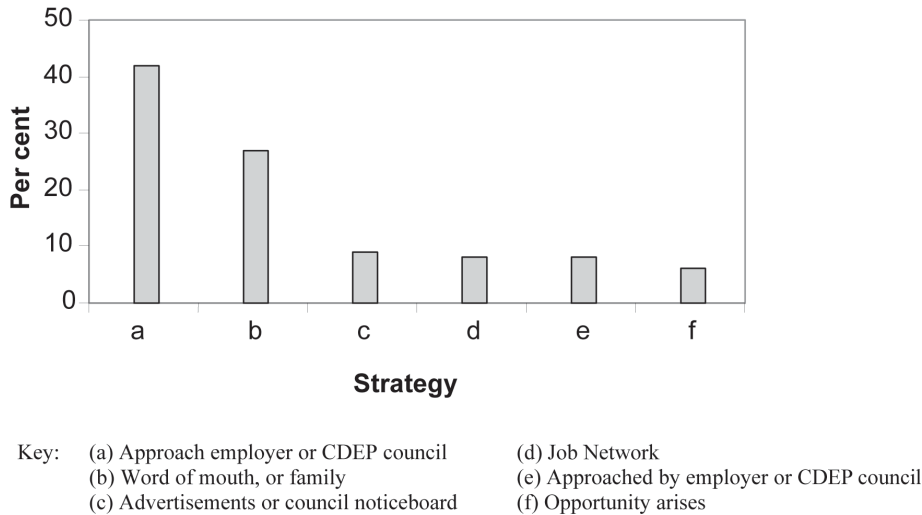
The outputs shown in Fig. 14.1 are the normal or basic CDEP part-time work (the arrangement in Torres Strait is often for participants to work alternate weeks), some infrastructure development, and the full-time employment and training just described. Thus, there are two main kinds of output: part-time work and full-time work and training. The full-time positions are subsidised by the wage savings and by funds from the other employers. Or, looked at another way, the full-time positions are subsidised by the CDEP.

### The 'good news' and 'bad news' about CDEP

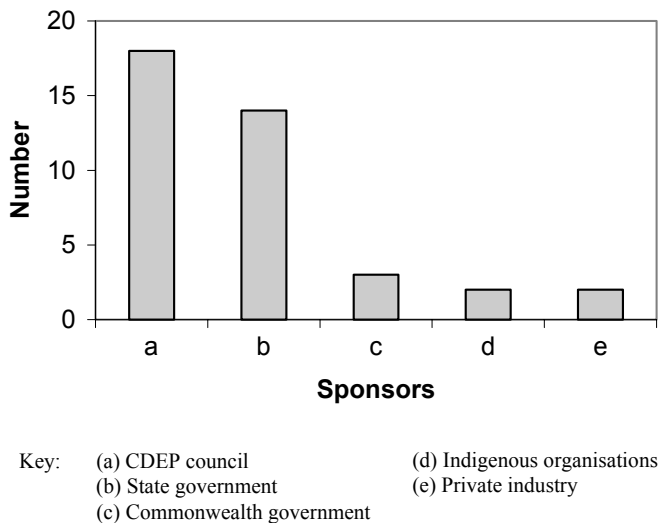
Data from the survey can be used to examine the role of CDEP in assisting young people to fulfil their aspirations. Fig. 14.2 shows the ways that young people say they have got jobs in the past, and how they plan to look for jobs and opportunities in the future. These are ranked in Fig. 14.2, with most important furthest to the left. The most common strategy that people have used, and would plan to use, is to approach employers directly in person. This includes approaching their CDEP council and in fact all of the young people living on the small island community said that this is a strategy they would use to look for work. In addition, some said that they got their jobs, apprenticeships, or traineeships by looking at the advertisements posted by their council on the council noticeboard. Others said that the council approached them and offered them jobs and training. This often included the full-time training and employment mentioned earlier. Fig. 14.2 also shows that many people get their jobs or opportunities through family contacts and through word of mouth. On the other hand, very few people expected to get jobs through Job Network. Indeed, no one interviewed on the small island community said they would use Job Network, and what is more, many were not sure what Job Network was, or what it provided.

Fig. 14.3 shows where the young people who were interviewed were getting their training, including their full-time traineeships and apprenticeships. Quite a few got their training through the State government. However, the most common way of becoming involved in training was through a CDEP council. Both Fig. 14.2 and Fig. 14.3 show that very few traineeships and apprenticeships were in private industry. Taken together, the results shown in Figs 14.2 and 14.3 suggest that the CDEP community councils are playing a significant role in providing pathways for young people to jobs and training opportunities. This is the 'good news'. However, this has to be balanced against the apparently 'bad news' that young people do not seem to think that CDEP will be much use to them in furthering their careers, as explained below.

**Figure 14.2 How young people look for and get jobs or training, Torres Strait, 1999**

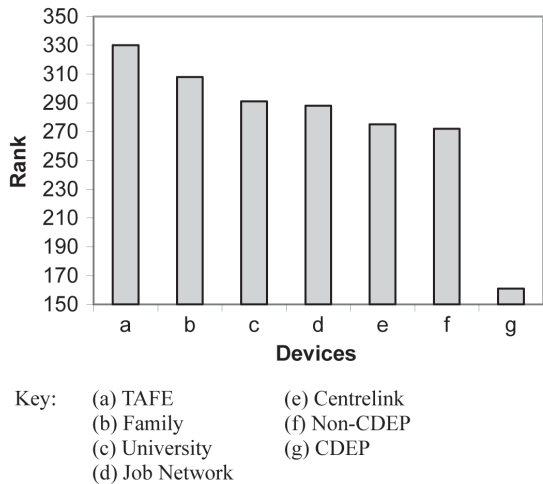


**Figure 14.3 Training sponsors, Torres Strait, 1999**



A set of devices that might help people with their careers is given in Fig. 14.4. The young people in the survey were asked to say which of these they thought would be useful to them. Fig. 14.4 shows that they thought that TAFE and their families would be the most helpful. They also thought that university, Job Network, Centrelink and work outside CDEP could help them further their careers. However, it is very noticeable that they did not think CDEP would be much help. This is the 'bad news', and it presents something of a quandary: if, as argued in the previous section, CDEP councils are playing a significant role in presenting young people with opportunities, why do they think that CDEP would not help them with their careers? The answer to this may lie partly in the things that young people say they value in a job—the things that attract them to various jobs and activities. Some of these are described below.

**Figure 14.4 Devices thought useful for career, Torres Strait, 1999**



Note: People were asked to give each item a score of one to four. The rank of an item is its total score divided by the number of responses relating to it, multiplied by 100.

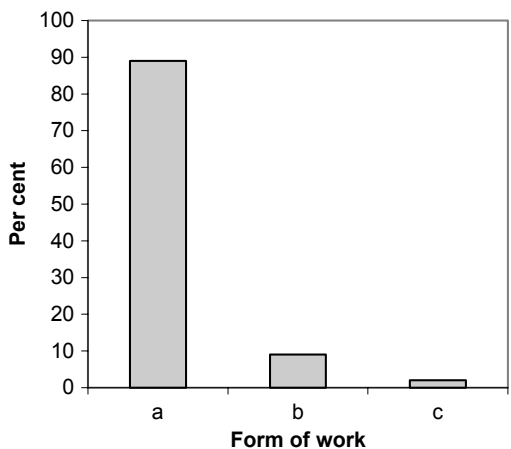
### The features that people value in work and training

People appear to place a high value on full-time work. Fig. 14.5 shows that almost 90 per cent of all the young people interviewed said that they preferred full-time work to part-time work or to no work at all.

Figs 14.6 and 14.7 show some other qualities that young people say they like in work or training. Fig. 14.6 shows that when young people are asked why they want to take up or like certain work they say that it is because it interests them: they like work that they find interesting. This was a major reason for preferring full-time work: it was thought more interesting than part-time work. Young people also said they liked work that kept them busy all the time. In addition, they liked work and training that they thought would help them achieve their *long-term* goals; and that was getting them somewhere in life. Other qualities that people appear to value in work are some security, reasonable pay, and the opportunity for promotion (see Fig. 14.7). Part-time work is not valued at all highly.

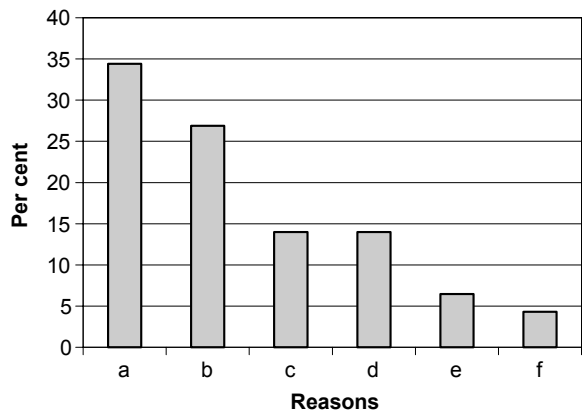


**Figure 14.5 Preferred form of work, Torres Strait, 1999**



Key: (a) Full-time  
(b) Part-time  
(c) No work

**Figure 14.6 Reason for working or training, Torres Strait, 1999**

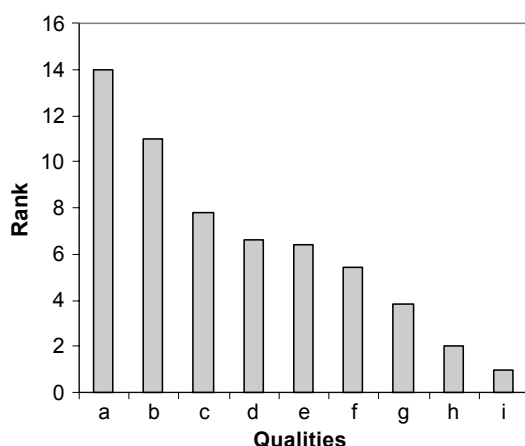


Key: (a) Interest (d) Family/community  
(b) Achieve goal (e) Keep busy  
(c) Money (f) Control

Taking all of these features together it would seem that the ideal job would be interesting, full-time, and reasonably paid; it would afford the chance for some promotion and provide job security. If we compare these features against CDEP employment, we can suggest that it is only the last of these that might apply to it. CDEP work is normally part-time and elsewhere in the survey young people described the work as very boring.

On the other hand, young people found the full-time employment and full-time training that was subsidised by CDEP (shown as one of the outputs in Fig. 14.1) to be extremely enjoyable. Indeed, people aspired to this kind of position. Those that were in this form of

**Figure 14.7** Qualities valued in work, Torres Strait, 1999



- Key:
- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| (a) Job security         | (f) Working with Indigenous organisations |
| (b) Pay level            | (g) Being own boss                        |
| (c) Promotion            | (h) Making own hours                      |
| (d) Working with friends | (i) Working part time                     |
| (e) Having no stress     |   |

Note: Respondents were asked to choose from the list the three qualities that they valued most in a job. The scores for each were totalled and then ranked, giving the least-mentioned quality (working part time) the score of one.

work found it interesting and contrasted it with the part-time CDEP work which they found pointless and boring. Therefore, when young people said that they did not value CDEP and did not think that it would help them with their careers, they were really talking about the normal part-time CDEP work, not about the full-time positions that were facilitated by the scheme.

## Policy implications

What, if anything, does all this mean for policy? Making work interesting is hard at the best of times. In some of the marginal economies in remote areas it is doubly hard, and it is a big ask for CDEP councils. Moreover, do young people really want full-time work? In Torres Strait, many fish commercially on their CDEP week off, or leave CDEP to go fishing at short notice. This put into question whether they would really want always to work full-time and have less chance to fish.

Nonetheless, young people do like and aspire to the full-time opportunities created by CDEP councils. These are made available by using CDEP creatively to form arrangements with other employers such as the schools. Councils may also use the wage savings which occur when people elect to come off CDEP for short periods. It is not clear how much these wage savings contributed to creating full-time opportunities for young people. However, it seems that council access to these monies may be reduced with the introduction of the CDEPManager program. This may in turn limit the councils' ability to create the full-time positions that young people appear to value.

Accountability of public monies, such as those in CDEP, is important and the CDEPManager program seems designed with accountability in mind. However, it can also be argued that CDEP is being used by councils as a development program, to create opportunities, and that councils therefore need some leeway regarding how the funds are used. Care needs to be taken to ensure that an overemphasis on accountability does not stifle the ability of CDEP practitioners in the field from using the program to stimulate development.

## Notes

1. People may elect not to work on CDEP in order to go commercial fishing.

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# 15. CDEP as a conduit to the 'real' economy?

## The Port Augusta case

*Matthew Gray and Elaine Thacker*

### Introduction

The role of the CDEP scheme as a stepping stone to employment in the 'mainstream' labour market is receiving a great deal of attention at present. This accords with the emphasis in the current social policy environment on 'mutual obligation'. The CDEP scheme undoubtedly has similarities to the 'work for the dole' program available to all Australians, but its success in acting as a stepping stone to unsubsidised employment is clearly related to the non-CDEP labour market opportunities in particular regions. In remote areas these opportunities are generally much more limited than in rural and urban areas. There has been little research on the success (or otherwise) of the scheme in its role as a stepping stone to unsubsidised employment in regional centres and urban areas. In an attempt to help to fill this gap, we present here the results of a case study of the Bungala Aboriginal Corporation (hereafter Bungala) in Port Augusta, South Australia.<sup>1</sup> The choice of Bungala was influenced by a number of factors. Port Augusta is a regional centre with labour market opportunities, and Bungala has an impressive record of helping its participants to find unsubsidised employment, of placing participants in subsidised employment, and in generating income through its Construction Program.

### Port Augusta: The economic and social context

Port Augusta is a regional city located at the top of the Spencer Gulf, in Nukunu traditional country, 300 kilometres north of Adelaide in South Australia. It is a place of significance to Indigenous Australians from a large area, including the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, the Flinders Ranges and the Eyre Peninsula. Within Port Augusta there is a distinct Indigenous community living at the Davenport community. Although this is an important point of reference, the majority of the Indigenous population live in the township of Port Augusta itself. Indigenous people in the region are geographically very mobile, often moving between Port Augusta, Davenport, and remote communities in the far north and north-west of South Australia (see Marika (1995) for a more detailed discussion).<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the 1996 Census there were 14 315 people enumerated as living in Port Augusta, of whom 1917 (or 13 per cent) identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. The Indigenous population is much younger than the non-Indigenous population: their median ages are 21 and 35 years respectively. A combination of a younger population, a higher fertility rate, and a net out-migration of non-Indigenous people means that over the next few decades Indigenous people are likely to comprise an increasing proportion of the Port Augusta population (South Australian Centre for Economic Studies 1998).

The Port Augusta economy has been in decline for a number of years. Between 1991 and 1996 the numbers in employment fell from 6276 to 5114, a fall of 18.5 per cent. Major job losses occurred in the transport and storage, electricity, gas and water supply and manufacturing industries. But the decline is primarily due to cutbacks in public sector employment, with 588 jobs being lost from the Commonwealth government and 275 from the State government. At the same time employment growth in the private sector has been stagnant.

The loss of employment and economic decline is reflected in the labour force statistics for Port Augusta. At the time of the 1996 Census the employment to population ratio among the non-Indigenous population was 60.3 per cent and the unemployment rate was high, at 13.0 per cent. Indigenous people fare even worse, with an employment to population ratio of just 28.1 per cent and an unemployment rate of 33.0 per cent—a level which would be unacceptable in the wider community.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the low levels of Indigenous employment, the low wages and salaries received by those who are employed, and the high levels of dependence on social security payments, Indigenous persons have a median personal income of just \$196 per week. This is significantly lower than the median of \$259 per week for the non-Indigenous population.

## **Overview of Bungala**

### **Organisational structure**

Bungala Aboriginal Corporation is a corporate CDEP, and the largest CDEP organisation in South Australia. It now has 310 participants, and is the fifth largest employer in Port Augusta. From its administrative centre in Port Augusta it services a number of satellite work sites over a range of 450 kilometres, from Port Pirie in the south to Nepabunna in the northern Flinders Ranges.<sup>4</sup> The satellite schemes are primarily community organisations, responsible for providing a variety of services to their communities.

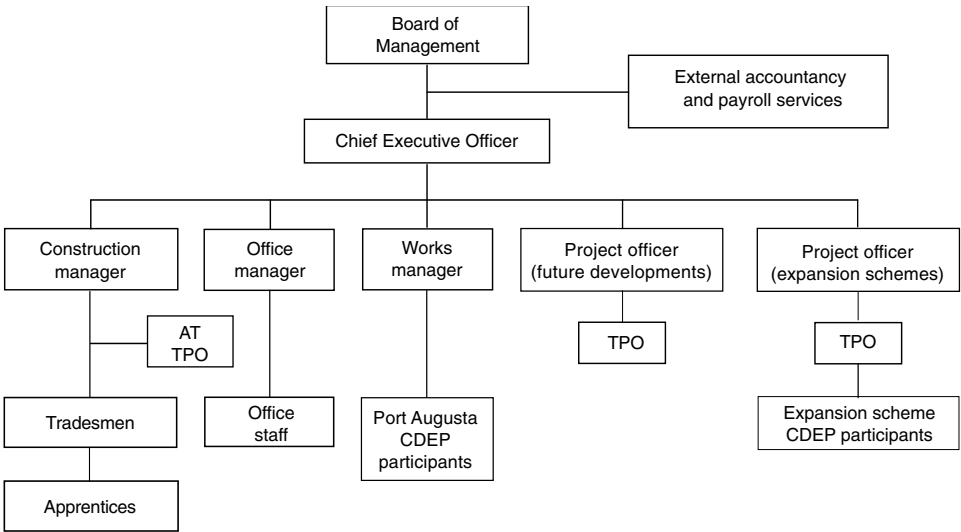
Bungala has a Board of Management that is responsible for making the major decisions about the overall running of the organisation. The board members are CDEP participants who are elected for a term of one year by their fellow participants. The Board appoints a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is responsible for the operation of the scheme and who reports directly to the Board (see Fig. 15.1).

Bungala's work activities are organised into three main work programs: the Construction Program; the Works Program; and the Expansion (satellite scheme) Program. Each of these programs has a full-time manager who reports directly to the CEO. The Office Section, headed by the Office Manager, provides administrative support. There is also a Project Officer responsible for developing new ventures and sources of funding. Bungala hires external accountants to manage its payroll and finances, and to provide financial reporting.

The Works Program provides two days a week of work to participants in Port Augusta. Many of the participants have very limited, if any, non-CDEP employment experience and lack basic work skills. There are a number of work groups undertaking a wide range of work activities including cleaning up yards, firewood collection, arts and crafts production, and the running of a licensed child-care centre. Each work group has a full-

time supervisor who is also a CDEP participant. These supervisors tend to be older, long-standing participants, many of whom have employment experience outside CDEP. Their seniority generates respect and provides them with moral authority. The close personal interaction that occurs between participants and the supervisors is an important factor in the development of the participants' work skills and general life skills. As of July 2000 the Works Program had the largest number of personnel, with 132 participants and 11 full-time supervisors.

**Figure 15.1 Organisational structure of Bungala CDEP, 2000**



Key: AT = Administrative officer TPO = Trainee project officer

The Expansion Program provides work activities two days a week for participants in the satellite schemes. The nature of the work activities and the way in which work is managed are primarily determined by the relevant Aboriginal organisation in each community and vary from site to site. In the remote satellite schemes, the opportunities for unsubsidised employment are very limited and therefore the focus is on community development objectives. The work culture in these satellite schemes is much more like that typically found in remote CDEPs (Altman & Taylor 1989). These programs employ a total of 76 participants and one full-time tradesman.

The Construction Program, as its name suggests, undertakes construction work. In general this work is won through competitive tender. Bungala has won contracts to build both residential and commercial buildings as well as for renovations, office refits and a variety of maintenance jobs. There are nine fully qualified tradesmen (who are not CDEP participants) employed in the Construction Program and 19 CDEP participants who are employed full-time and are undertaking apprenticeships. Apprenticeship training leads to a recognised qualification.

In addition to those working in the three work programs and the Office Section, 65 of the CDEP participants are placed with non-CDEP employers. These participants generally work five days a week for the non-CDEP employer, with Bungala contributing the participants' wages allocation (wages for two days a week) to the costs of employing that person. The non-CDEP employer contributes the balance of the participant's earnings. This arrangement is very much like the traditional wage subsidy.

### **The work culture**

Bungala's participants come from a wide range of backgrounds and their experience of employment varies widely. There are also differences in their career aspirations and in what they hope to achieve by participating in CDEP. Of particular relevance to this paper are aspirations about moving to 'mainstream' employment.<sup>5</sup> Almost half of the participants interviewed said that they did not wish to leave CDEP for mainstream employment; the remainder indicated their wish to do so. In general, participants wanted to make the move either to earn more money or because they became bored on those days on which they were not working on CDEP.

For participants in the 'remote' Expansion Program work sites, the question about wanting to move to mainstream employment had little relevance because there is virtually no employment available in their areas. Some of these participants indicated that they would like to move to mainstream employment, but they did not consider it a possibility.

In order to balance the different objectives and the diverse needs of participants each work program has developed a distinct work culture. A feature common to all is the enforcement of a 'no work, no pay' rule for all participants.

In the Works Program, the primary objective is to provide meaningful work and allow participants to develop basic work skills. They work for two days a week in what they perceive as a comfortable work environment. While the no work, no pay rule is enforced, the work culture is sympathetic to the fact that many of the participants employed in this group have very limited work experience or skills.

The Expansion Program also provides work activities for participants for two days per week. The nature of these activities, and the way in which work is managed are mostly determined by the relevant Aboriginal organisation in each community, according to local needs and aspirations. It is more difficult to enforce the no work, no pay rule in this program because of the greater autonomy in determining the work rules, and because it is difficult for staff in Port Augusta to monitor the work efforts of participants in distant locations.

In the Construction Program the culture more closely reflects the mainstream labour market and participants are expected to be more reliable in their work attendance and to work industriously to develop a high level of technical competence. However, as in the Work Program, the work culture allows for some accommodation of family and cultural demands which at times may conflict with the requirements of running a commercial business. Bungala provides a considerable amount of training to participants in the Construction Program.



The clear separation between the different work programs within the organisational structure of Bungala has allowed the different work practices and cultures to develop. Managers can provide a consistent set of rules, and minimise perceptions of unfairness and tensions that might otherwise arise as the result of the application of different work cultures to people who are working side by side.

## Commercial activities

### The financial context

Bungala's business enterprises are an integral component of its interaction with mainstream economic institutions, but they must first be set in the wider financial context. In the financial year 1999–2000 Bungala had a total income of nearly \$5 million (Table 15.1). The source of most of its funding is ATSIC, which provides for participant wages and on-cost funding. The level of participant wages funding is based on the number of participants.<sup>6</sup> On-cost funding includes recurrent funding, which is used for the administration of the scheme, and capital funding for the purchase of capital items. ATSIC participant wages, the largest funding item, contributed \$2.6 million in 1999–2000. ATSIC on-cost funding is also important: recurrent funding in the same financial year was \$500 000 and capital funding was \$295 000. Overall, ATSIC funding in 1999–2000 was \$3.4 million, around 68 per cent of Bungala's total income.

Additional funding of \$500 000 was obtained from other organisations, including DEWRSB and the South Australian Department of Employment, Education and Training. The remaining income is project-generated, through commercial activities. In 1999–2000 project generated income amounted to \$1.1 million.

**Table 15.1 Sources of income, Bungala, 1995–96 to 1999–2000**

|                                  | 1995–96     | 1996–97   | 1997–98   | 1998–99   | 1999–2000 |
|----------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Source                           | Amount (\$) |           |           |           |           |
| Funding: ATSIC recurrent         | 373 493     | 329 206   | 376 894   | 511 723   | 496 959   |
| Funding: ATSIC capital           | 213 936     | 202 088   | 91 638    | 438 391   | 294 868   |
| Funding: ATSIC participant wages | 1 223 663   | 1 160 765 | 1 493 441 | 2 112 385 | 2 585 943 |
| Funding: Other                   | 398 225     | 310 893   | 75 142    | 339 543   | 469 274   |
| Project generated income         | 60 524      | 96 728    | 234 624   | 685 884   | 1 069 457 |
| Interest received                | 12 921      | 13 211    | 10 375    | 20 033    | 50 848    |
| Total income                     | 2 282 762   | 2 112 891 | 2 282 114 | 4 107 959 | 4 967 349 |

Source: Adapted from Compilation Report to Bungala Aboriginal Corporation, 19 July 2000, Inglis & Rowe, Certified Practising Accountants.

Over the period 1995–96 to 1999–2000 there has been an increase in income from \$2.23 million to \$4.9 million (Table 15.1), largely due to increases in ATSIC wages funding, from \$1.2 million to \$2.6 million. This reflects the growing number of participants and increases in their rates of pay. Project-generated income has increased dramatically, from \$60 524 in 1995–96 to \$1 069 457 in 1999–2000.

### **Commercial viability**

Almost all of the project-generated income is produced by the Construction Program through competitively tendered projects. Initially there was doubt among the local non-Indigenous population about Bungala's ability to successfully undertake construction projects. As a result, almost all of the successful tenders were obtained from Indigenous organisations, or the South Australian Housing Trust, for the construction and maintenance of housing for Indigenous people. The successful completion of a number of projects appears to have changed industry perceptions to the extent that Bungala has now successfully completed several very visible jobs for non-Indigenous clients.

Although there was project-generated income of \$1.1 million in 1999–2000, the costs of generating this income, excluding CDEP participant wages and administrative support funded by ATSIC and funding received from DEWRSB, was at least as much. When the CDEP participant wages and funding from DEWRSB is added, the amount of money spent in earning this income is greater than the amount of income received. In other words Bungala's commercial activities do not make an accounting profit.

This lack of commercial viability is attributable to the fact that most of the participants come from the ranks of the long-term unemployed, and have never had previous employment. They need intensive graduated training, focusing on basic work skills and routines. This sort of training is very expensive and raises cost structures significantly above that of Bungala's competitors: the Construction Program has 1.6 apprentices for every tradesman, a much higher ratio than that found in the construction industry generally.

### **Movement to non-CDEP employment**

One of the continuing objectives of Bungala is to assist participants to acquire skills that lead to unsubsidised employment. Between 30 and 40 participants leave Bungala each year for such employment (Table 15.2). The number of CDEP participants finding unsubsidised employment any given year is impressive given the extremely low levels of employability of most participants when they enter the scheme and the very low rates of employment of Indigenous people in Port Augusta and surrounding regions. It must be remembered also that around 50 per cent of participants do not wish to leave CDEP for other employment.

**Table 15.2 Movements to unsubsidised employment, Bungala, 1996–2000**

| Year      | Participant ceiling | Move to unsubsidised employment |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1996–97   |                     | 33                              |
| 1997–98   | 129                 | 68                              |
| 1998–99   | 253                 | 39                              |
| 1999–2000 | 310                 | 40                              |

Source: Bungala Annual Report (various years), Bungala Aboriginal Corporation, Port Augusta.

The exceptionally large number of participants moving to unsubsidised employment in 1997–98 was primarily due to the Roxby mine expansion, which increased the demand for labour in the region. This shows that when there is strong labour demand in the region, suitably qualified Indigenous people are successful in finding employment.

For participants to find employment two barriers have to be surmounted. First, their work skills need to be developed so that it is profitable to employ them. Second, they need to be able to find an employer who considers them to be employable and is willing to employ them. Bungala is able to address both of these issues directly.

### **Training**

Bungala provides a considerable amount of training to participants in the Construction Program. Much of this is informal, and involves participants gaining basic work skills and routines. In addition, Bungala provides a considerable amount of formal training through traineeships, apprenticeships, and short courses undertaken through TAFE.

The administrative rules of ABSTUDY and CDEP allow participants undertaking CDEP employment two days per week to enrol as part-time students in accredited courses and receive ABSTUDY payments as well as CDEP participant wages. This enables those participants to receive close to a full-time income. A large number of Bungala's participants take advantage of this arrangement.

Bungala has developed an internal labour market that allows participants to be promoted within the scheme. The possibility of promotion is a critical component of the scheme, providing participants with the incentive to work well and enhancing their chances of finding employment outside of CDEP.

### **Real work opportunities**

There is a clear relationship between the commercial activities of Bungala and assisting participants to find unsubsidised employment. There are four main benefits to Bungala and its participants from its business enterprises. First, they allow Bungala to employ skilled tradesmen and supervisors which is essential to the scheme operating well. Second, they enable Bungala to provide a number of participants with full-time, relatively well paid work. This is critical in allowing the scheme to develop an internal labour market and to generate the incentives to motivate participants.

Third, they provide excellent training for participants in the form of traineeships and apprenticeships in areas for which there are employment opportunities in the region. The training environment created by having apprentices and trainees working on real construction sites and with other Indigenous people is one in which they are socially comfortable and likely to succeed. Spicer (1997) in his review of the CDEP scheme arrived at a similar conclusion. The system provides an alternative to the usual classroom-based training environment in which many Indigenous people feel uncomfortable. Yet it still results in a recognised qualification (Schwab 1997, 1998; see also Campbell & Schwab, Ch. 12, this volume).

Finally, the construction work results in a quality finished product which is highly visible. Anecdotal evidence from the local business community suggests that this has improved the public perception of Bungala, and altered the wider community's perceptions of Indigenous people. Public perception of the quality of work is important in helping participants find unsubsidised employment because employers are likely to value and view favourably their work experience with Bungala. The visible success of Bungala's Construction Program gives participants and the wider Indigenous community a sense of pride.

## **Conclusion**

One of the fundamental differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in regional centres experiencing economic decline is that many of the latter will move to areas with better economic prospects, whereas the Indigenous population remains. Thus the Indigenous population comprises an increasing proportion of the total population in many declining regional centres, such as Port Augusta. This raises the problem of how government can provide a framework in which Indigenous people in these areas can have an opportunity to actively participate in the labour market. CDEP provides an avenue to assist people who wish to find unsubsidised employment at the same time as providing meaningful work to people who do not. CDEP organisations in regional centres and urban areas need to maintain a delicate balance between the 'Aboriginalisation' of work and providing work activities that make people employable.

Bungala serves as a model of how CDEP schemes in regional centres and urban areas can meet their multiple objectives of assisting participants to acquire skills which result in unsubsidised employment, developing business enterprises, and providing employment in a community development setting. The study demonstrates that, in Port Augusta, CDEP is an important conduit to the 'real' economy for participants wishing to make this move. But just as importantly it also provides an avenue for participants who do not wish to find non-CDEP employment to undertake useful work in an environment that allows them to balance their cultural and family commitments with the demands of employment. It is possible to provide what from the government's point of view would be considered real and meaningful employment on the CDEP. Not everybody should be encouraged to leave. This is true for perhaps half of Bungala's participants, maybe more.

Not all CDEPs in regions with comparable labour market opportunities are as successful as Bungala in facilitating the movement of Indigenous people into employment, whether it be on CDEP or in the 'mainstream' (Smith 1994, 1995). Several factors have been identified as critical to Bungala's success. These are the development of an internal labour market, the employment of high quality supervisors and tradesmen, the use of the commercial enterprises as a training ground for the participants, and local business perceptions of Bungala and its participants engendered by the high quality of the work they produce.

None of this would be possible without income in addition to ATSIC's funding for participant wages, and capital and recurrent funding. While commercial activities can generate income, they are extremely unlikely, because of the high training component, ever to be profitable in an accounting sense. In the past wages surpluses could be used to provide additional work; this is no longer possible. If the government wishes for CDEPs like Bungala to continue to operate effectively, then it must increase funding, in one way or another.

## Notes

1. The analysis presented here is based upon primary data collected during eight days of fieldwork in Port Augusta in July 2000, and secondary data analysis of the 1986, 1991 and 1996 Censuses and ATSIC administrative data. During the fieldwork extensive discussions were held with the management of Bungala, the CEO, and members of the Board of Management. Questionnaires were administered to 35 participants, and a number of the work sites in Port Augusta and many of the satellite schemes were also visited. During these visits discussions were held with work supervisors and participants were interviewed. Discussions were held with other stakeholders, including Inglis and Rowe Certified Practising Accountants (Bungala's accountants), Centrelink's Port Augusta Manager, Job Network providers (Complete Personnel and Mission Australia), Port Augusta City Council City Manager, and the CEO of the Northern Areas Regional Development Board. A follow-up visit was made to Bungala in September 2000 in order to present and discuss the research findings. An expanded version of this paper was published as a CAEPR Discussion Paper (Gray & Thacker 2000).
2. There are many reasons why Indigenous people choose to move between these areas, including attendance at ceremonies, access to services (particularly medical services), and maintenance of relationships with other family members.
3. Estimates are from the 1996 Census.
4. Satellite schemes are located at Davenport, Nepabunna, Iga Warta, Beltana, Port Pirie, and Hawker.
5. The short questionnaire that was administered to 35 participants included questions on why the person was on CDEP, whether or not they wanted to leave CDEP for 'mainstream' employment, and why. In addition there were questions on basic personal

characteristics (such as age, gender and marital status), about previous work experience, and about what the participant was doing immediately before starting CDEP.

6. There are two participant rates. One is for participants in remote areas; the other for participants in non-remote areas. As of 1 July 2000 the remote rate was \$194.58 per week and the non-remote rate was \$175.24 per week.

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## 16. Yuendumu CDEP: The Warlpiri work ethic and Kardiya staff turnover<sup>1</sup>

*Yasmine Musharbash*

### Introduction

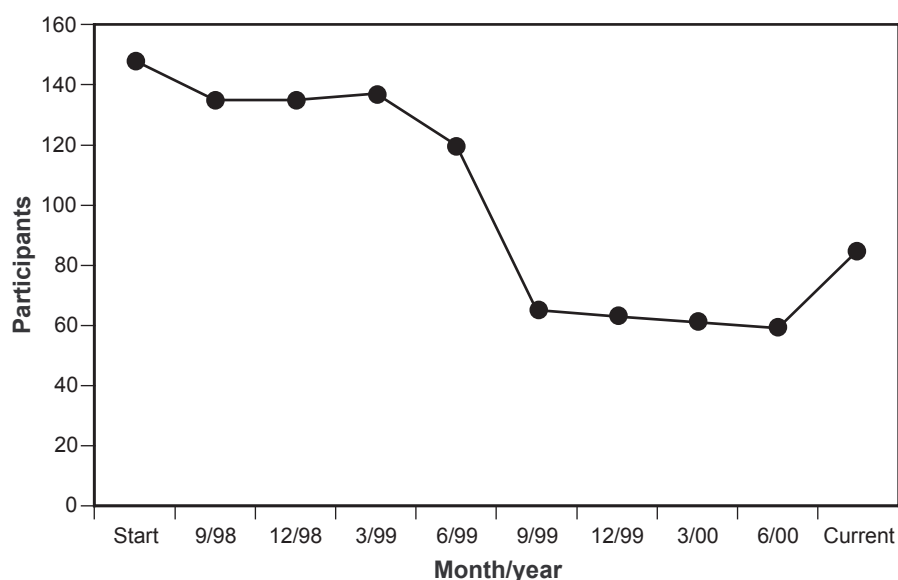
Yuendumu is one of the largest Aboriginal communities in Central Australia: the ABS reported 773 usual residents for the community in 1996.<sup>2</sup> It was set up as a government ration station in 1946 (Meggitt 1962) and is located about 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs on the Tanami Track. The main languages spoken are Warlpiri and English.

Yuendumu CDEP started up in March 1997. Fig. 16.1 shows the CDEP participant numbers from the beginning of the program to early in 2001. Until June 1999 the numbers were relatively stable at 140. They then plummeted to about 60 where they remained until June 2000, after which they started rising again. The aim of this paper is to examine the reasons which underlie this rather unusual curve.

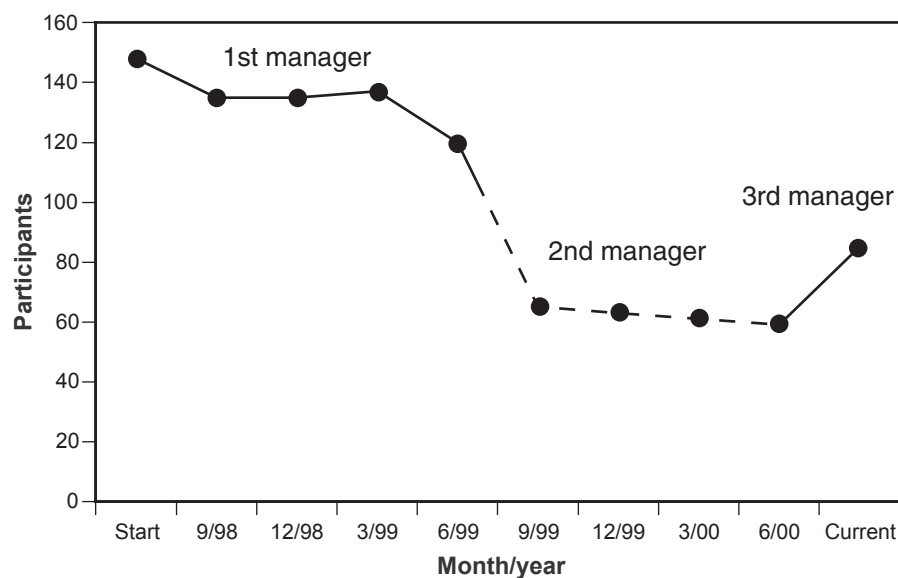
The most elementary explanation is suggested by a correlation with the changes in management of the program. Since its beginning in March 1997, Yuendumu CDEP has had three generations of management. Fig. 16.2 shows how changeovers in management seem to be directly related to the fluctuation in participant numbers. The first manager started in March 1997 and resigned some time around July 1999. During this period, the numbers were relatively stable around an average of 140 participants. Just preceding and following this person's resignation there was a steep drop in numbers to about 60 participants. The second manager signed on in September 1999 and left in May or June 2000. During this period, the number of participants was stable at 60. Numbers started rising again with the signing on of the third manager in July 2000.

If the number of participants is taken to be one indicator of the success of a CDEP scheme, and if it can be shown, as in the case of Yuendumu, that the number of CDEP participants and the identity of the manager are directly linked, then an analysis of the relationship between management and participants becomes imperative. It is also significant that in every case the CDEP manager was non-Indigenous. This is also true of management in other Yuendumu organisations (see also Altman, Ch. 13, this volume).<sup>3</sup> An analysis of the relationship between management and participants must therefore include an analysis of cross-cultural relations. The main part of this paper will consist of an examination of some of the attitudes and opinions held by Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons which underlie the status quo. It will be argued that they have a considerable history. More than 20 years ago Fred Myers studied very similar phenomena among Pintupi people (who live just to the south of Warlpiri people) when he examined 'the miscommunication that resulted across the cultural and ethnic boundaries of black and white through expectations and action based on differing cultural premises' (1980a: 311).

**Figure 16.1 Participant numbers, Yuendumu CDEP, 1998–2000**



**Figure 16.2 Turnover of CDEP managers in relation to participant numbers, Yuendumu CDEP, 1998–2001**



This paper will first provide some general statistical information about Yuendumu as contextual background for the ensuing discussion. It will then look at non-Indigenous perceptions of the work ethic and at Warlpiri ideas of the workplace. The third part of the discussion focuses on Warlpiri perceptions of non-Indigenous staff turnover. In the concluding part of the paper I indicate how the forgoing discussion throws light on the Yuendumu CDEP situation.



## Statistical background information

In Yuendumu, as in most parts of the Northern Territory and indeed elsewhere in Australia, people draw clear-cut distinctions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons and group them as black or white—Yapa or Kardiya.<sup>4</sup> These distinctions mirror the very different lifestyles and educational backgrounds of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.<sup>5</sup> In the 1996 Census, of the total Yuendumu population of 773 persons 70 per cent (or 609 persons) identified as Indigenous, and less than one-fifth (or 137 persons) identified as non-Indigenous.<sup>6</sup>

In looking at the qualifications of the Yuendumu population (see Table 16.1), the starkest contrast is in the area of University degrees. Six are held by Indigenous persons and 44 by non-Indigenous persons. Put differently, half of the non-Indigenous population over 15 years old holds a degree, as opposed to 1.3 per cent of the Indigenous population. On the other hand, 78 per cent (324) of Indigenous persons are not qualified at all (this number rises to 92 per cent if the categories ‘not stated’ and ‘inadequately described’ are included in the ‘Indigenous’ category), as opposed to only 32 per cent (29) of non-Indigenous persons.

**Table 16.1 Highest educational qualification (15 years and older), Yuendumu, 1996**

| Qualification            | Indigenous (no.) | Non-Indigenous (no.) |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Higher degree            | 0                | 3                    |
| Postgraduate diploma     | 0                | 3                    |
| Bachelor degree          | 6                | 33                   |
| Undergraduate diploma    | 0                | 5                    |
| University degree: total | 6                | 44                   |
| Associate diploma        | 8                | 3                    |
| Skilled vocational       | 0                | 8                    |
| Basic vocational         | 0                | 0                    |
| Inadequately described   | 3                | 3                    |
| Not qualified            | 324              | 29                   |
| Not stated               | 76               | 3                    |
| Total                    | 417              | 90                   |

Source: ABS 1998.

In 1996, only 19 per cent (78 out of 417) of Indigenous persons over 15 years old were employed, as opposed to 84 per cent (76 out of 90) of non-Indigenous persons (see Table 16.2).<sup>7</sup>

With this background information in mind, I now turn to an investigation of the various, and sometimes clashing, ideas held by individuals in Yuendumu about what ‘work’ is, and what it should be.

**Table 16.2 Occupations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, Yuendumu, 1996<sup>a</sup>**

| Occupation                                      | Indigenous (no.) | Non-Indigenous (no.) |
|---|------------------|----------------------|
| Manager/administrator                           | 0                | 4                    |
| Professional                                    | 6                | 29                   |
| Associate professional                          | 3                | 20                   |
| Tradesperson/related worker                     | 3                | 3                    |
| Advanced clerical or service worker             | 0                | 3                    |
| Intermediate clerical, sales, or service worker | 3                | 4                    |
| Intermediate production or transport worker     | 5                | 3                    |
| Elementary clerical, sales, or service worker   | 3                | 4                    |
| Labourer/related worker                         | 16               | 6                    |
| Inadequately described                          | 3                | 0                    |
| Not stated                                      | 36               | 0                    |
| Total (no.)                                     | 78               | 76                   |
| Percentage of population employed (%):          | 19               | 84                   |

Note: (a) Excludes persons unemployed, not in the labour force, and under 15 years of age.

Source: ABS 1998.

### Non-Indigenous perceptions of the Warlpiri work ethic

There are currently 20 projects and workshops in which CDEP participants at Yuendumu can be involved (not all are operating). In Table 16.3 these have been ranked in descending order according to chances of their leading to unsubsidised employment and likelihood of recurring training.

Apart from the ‘cultural’ category, all of these projects have a non-Indigenous person in the top managerial, coordination or administrative position. During the course of the research for this project I conducted interviews with a number of these administrators and with other non-Indigenous persons at Yuendumu who employ and work with Indigenous people. Almost all of the interviewees brought up the concept of ‘the Warlpiri work ethic’ in our conversations, without any prompting from me. Among their comments were:

**Table 16.3 CDEP projects at Yuendumu, 2001**

| Project name/location                    | Project work and training content   |
|--|---|
| Yuendumu School                          | Training through Batchelor College; teaching, clerical, school and teaching aides, child care, cleaning |
| Aged Care                                | Pick-up service, house cleaning, meals on wheels  |
| Warlpiri Media                           | Training through Batchelor College; filming, sound recording, editing, broadcasting                     |
| Child Care Centre                        | Training through Batchelor College; child care  |
| CDEP administration                      | Filing, computer skills, receptionist, payroll, etc.  |
| Yuendumu Revegetation                    | Training through Centralian College; select, plant and seed stock, prepare soil, plan land use          |
| Yuendumu Store and Mining Store cashier, | Stock control, display, stocking shelves, check out   |
| Workshop and yard                        | mechanical workshop, tyre repairs   |
| Substance Misuse Program                 | Sorting materials, stacking, safe storing   |
| Waste management and wood collection     | Fencing, tree planting, waste management at petrol sniffers' outstations                                |
| Building                                 | Truck driving, front loader and bobcat operation  |
| Warlukurlangu Artists Art Gallery        | Maintenance work  |
| Women's Centre and Night Patrol          | Database skills, office duties, preparing paints and canvas   |
| Housing management finance               | Cleaning, cooking, night patrol   |
| Steel Furniture                          | Training through Batchelor College; housing and management, office procedures                           |
| Small Contracts                          | Run in co-operation with Centralian College; welding, design, sales                                     |
| Park, Gardens and Landscaping            | Property maintenance  |
| Women's sewing                           | Landscaping 'The park', cemetery, ovals and home gardens  |
| Pottery                                  | Sewing  |
| Cultural                                 | Pottery   |
|  | Assist in cultural activities, funerals, etc.   |

They don't know about handling money, the government never educated them, the government handed out rations but never trained or helped Yapa how to handle money, this has an impact on work ethic... Also, sleep deprivation impacts on their work ethic.

They [the new CDEP managers] are up against it: what many people don't realise is that some or most of these people have *never* worked, have no idea about what it means to work for a certain amount of time for a certain amount of money.

We never know when CDEP employees will turn up, they walk off at a moment's notice, we can never depend on anyone, they lack work ethics, I wish I knew how to motivate them.

CDEP as a program: it's good, it works in many communities, the problem here is their work ethic. They come to work, sign on, sign off, maybe stay, maybe not, but make sure to collect their money.

The term 'work ethic' is used in a wide range of meanings in these comments. In the most positive light, non-Indigenous people use it in explaining that few of the Indigenous population have been exposed to the work requirements of mainstream Australian society. They explain in their own words that Warlpiri people have not been working for a very long time at all, that the welfare days and the soup kitchen are a recent memory and that work as paid labour is a newly introduced concept (see also Rowse 1998). In fact, the soup kitchen and the associated 'welfare days' were abolished in the early 1970s. The 'Warlpiri work ethic' is something that is understood within a historical context, and something which the non-Indigenous manager thinks he or she should help to develop and nurture. Others are simply baffled by the perceived lack of interest in work, by people not turning up for work on time or at all, and by people not staying for appropriate hours. In this respect, the 'Warlpiri work ethic' contrasts starkly with non-Indigenous persons' perceptions of their own work ethic: most are very dedicated to their jobs and work long hours, often six or seven days a week.

There are, of course, some Warlpiri people who genuinely enjoy their work and whose work performance correlates with non-Indigenous ideals of the work ethic. However, these come almost exclusively from among the few who have achieved accredited qualifications in areas they are interested in, most often education, child care, and health. They are the ones who get cited as 'proper good workers', and who have considerable autonomy within and control over their own work. Most Indigenous employees, however, are unskilled and incentives to work are few. Warlpiri people do articulate certain incentives for working: to combat boredom, to be with relatives or friends who work at a certain place, and, interestingly, to earn some money. This last reason is significant because often the amount people earn working is less than the payments they would receive when not working. I return to this below in the discussion of the importance of having a 'boss' who looks after one. The concept of 'boss' also comes into play when there is a perceived or real lack of autonomy in the workplace, a topic to which I now turn.

## Warlpiri ideas about the workplace

Warlpiri ideas about bosses and the relationship with them stem from Warlpiri concepts of social organisation and land tenure. Country, ceremonies, stories and other things in Warlpiri cosmology are jointly held by kirda and kurdungurlu (see Dussart 2000; Meggitt 1962; Munn 1973). Every person is kirda for some places and ceremonies and kurdungurlu for others, and these positions are acquired in different ways. No ceremony can be performed, no sacred site can be visited by only one or the other. Kirda and kurdungurlu have to operate jointly and are tied to each other by intricate rules of obligations, rights, duties and exchange. When these concepts are translated into Aboriginal English the metaphors employed most often stem from the field of labour. Kirda becomes 'boss' or 'owner' and kurdungurlu becomes 'worker' or 'policeman'.<sup>8</sup> Correspondingly, the Aboriginal English term for ceremony is 'business', as in 'sorry business', 'women's business' and so on.<sup>9</sup>

These metaphors are illuminating for an analysis of contemporary workplace relations at Yuendumu from an Indigenous perspective. Whereas many non-Indigenous persons consider their job done when they have met the requirements of their job, Warlpiri people expect something else beyond the actual work.<sup>10</sup> Ideally, there should be a personal relationship between boss and worker, where both are tied to each other by reciprocal obligations. A boss should look after his or her workers. This issue lies at the heart of many misunderstandings between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in the workplace. Most CDEP work that Warlpiri do is not satisfying in itself; it is not the work as such which keeps them working (or not, as the case may be) but their relationship to their boss. If there is a personal relationship that involves the boss caring for, looking after and helping the workers then, in return, they feel obliged to turn up for work. They come to work regularly not only because of their 'obligation' to 'help' the boss, but also because they feel part of and included in the workplace.<sup>11</sup> The 'looking after' that a good boss is expected to do covers a wide range of activities and attitudes such as, for example, showing acceptance of and tolerance for cultural obligations of workers (like absences for 'sorry business'), offering seats to workers first when driving to town, assisting with bureaucratic matters, allowing access to office and private resources such as the telephones, and generally 'caring' for workers.<sup>12</sup> A case study will make the point.

Melissa had been working for a Yuendumu organisation for many years.<sup>13</sup> One day, her 12-year-old son came into the office and asked her for some money to buy lunch. Melissa did not have any money on her and asked her boss, Gertrude, for five dollars. Gertrude answered that the organisation, in compliance with ATSIC directions, had just stopped giving out loans and that she could not help. Melissa left work and did not return for a number of days.

Both told the story to me. Melissa pointed out that she had worked for the organisation for a long time and that she was owed some respect. She did not ask for a workplace loan but had expected her boss Gertrude to lend her five dollars of her own money—which she would have repaid. The denial of those five dollars by her boss made her feel as though she was not a valued person. Gertrude in turn did not understand why

Melissa, a very reliable worker, did not turn up the next day or the one after. She did not realise that her refusal to lend Melissa the five dollars had deeply hurt her and almost destroyed their relationship.

I have chosen this example to point out that ‘looking after’ very often entails only little things but that the chances for cultural misunderstandings in everyday interactions are enormous. If a non-Indigenous boss fails to fulfil the perceived obligation of ‘looking after’, Warlpiri often vote with their feet. This is one issue contributing to the cycles of success and decline that regularly affect most organisations and institutions at Yuendumu. This pattern of rise and decline generates, but is also generated in part by, the rate of non-Indigenous staff turnover.

### Warlpiri perceptions of non-Indigenous staff turnover

Much has been written on Aboriginal mobility, particularly in remote areas (see Taylor 1996a, 1996b; Taylor & Bell 1999; Young & Doohan 1989). But while Aboriginal people are highly mobile, their movements are usually confined within a region and have focal points of reference. By comparison, the non-Indigenous population in remote communities is effectively much more transient: individuals move in and out of the region (see Table 16.4). This partly explains the different emphases and viewpoints of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people: whereas non-Indigenous people complain about Warlpiri workers not turning up to work from one day to the next, Warlpiri people complain about non-Indigenous people coming, staying for a year or two, and then leaving forever, and thereby demonstrating a lack of commitment to the people and the place.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 16.4 Non-Indigenous managerial turnover at Yuendumu, 1995–2000**

| Organisation                                 | No. of senior managerial staff, 1995–2000 |
|--|---|
| CDEP office                                  | 3   |
| Child Care Centre                            | 3   |
| Clinic                                       | 3   |
| Council Clerk                                | 6   |
| Yuendumu Store                               | 3   |
| Mining Store                                 | 1   |
| Aged Care program                            | 1   |
| School                                       | 3   |
| Warlpiri Media                               | 3   |
| Warlukurlangu Artists                        | 3   |
| Women’s Centre                               | 4   |
| Average no. of senior staff per organisation | 2.9                                       |
| Average turnover time (years)                | 2.1                                       |

Table 16.4 shows the turnover of managers or coordinators of some selected organisations at Yuendumu (numbers are potentially higher, as I have no data for the periods I was absent). These indicate that the average stay of a non-Indigenous manager or coordinator at Yuendumu is a fraction over two years. Other non-Indigenous staff turnover is probably even higher.

It is indicative that the non-Indigenous persons who have stayed at Yuendumu longest are those with the fewest complaints about the 'Warlpiri work ethic'. They are the ones who call Yuendumu home, and have meaningful relationships with their Indigenous colleagues and workers. To varying degrees, they have a good understanding of Warlpiri culture and have acquired Warlpiri language skills.

## Discussion

The objective of CDEP is:

to provide work for indigenous persons in community-managed activities which assist the individual in acquiring skills which benefit the community, develop business enterprises and/or lead to unsubsidised employment (Spicer 1997).

Within a remote community context there are some serious obstacles that lie between the objective and its successful realisation. My focus here is not on the question of how successfully Yuendumu CDEP fulfils its objective but rather on what issues pose serious obstacles to the success of CDEP in remote communities like Yuendumu.

First, it seems that Yuendumu CDEP—and this may be true of CDEPs in most remote communities—faces the same challenges in the year 2001 that Myers outlined 20 years ago. The following passage, written of Papunya in the 1970s, could equally have been written of Yuendumu today:

In Papunya, absenteeism among health workers was common, often to the distress of the white staff when emergencies arose. Sometimes the health workers simply found their medical responsibilities to be in conflict with other obligations—especially obvious when ceremonies were under way. Viewed as 'flexibility,' this is precisely the quality said to be valued or desirable by Aboriginal people. This policy leads to high staff turnover. On the other hand, the most dependable Aboriginal workers appeared to labour out of a personal sense of obligation to a 'boss,' from whom they expected a reciprocal special relationship in turn. In these terms, quitting or taking leave from the job was a personal matter (Myers 1986: 279).

The question for CDEP then becomes: how should Yuendumu CDEP accommodate to Warlpiri ideas about the workplace? To ignore them causes a dramatic decline in participant numbers, whereas to observe them is to foster understandings that would not serve Warlpiri people well in the mainstream workplace. Second, the aim of 'providing unemployed Indigenous persons with activities leading to employment' has to be reconsidered in the light of options available to participants in remote communities.

The quality of work that is currently provided does have an impact on participant staff turnover. Most CDEP jobs are manual, and although their execution ‘benefits the community’ they do not necessarily provide participants with much job satisfaction. Garbage collection, fence building, road grading, cleaning, the collection of firewood and the fixing of tyres are all essential services within a remote community context. However, these jobs in particular seem to be the ones that participants sign on for occasionally, only to sign off to go back to welfare payments when other events in their lives require their time and attention. Since participants have the choice between doing these jobs on CDEP wages or receiving equal welfare payments it is not hard to understand why there is a lot of participant turnover in this area. It is here, in particular, that a good boss–worker relationship is an incentive for staying in a job, and the absence of such a relationship, as well as boredom and job dissatisfaction, lead to signing off.

Finally, it has to be asked: how realistic is the idea of unsubsidised labour in a remote community context? In communities like Yuendumu, to provide activities which ‘develop business enterprises and/or lead to unsubsidised employment’ is a distant goal. There are some CDEP jobs that provide and require formal training. These often guarantee the participant a larger degree of autonomy over the actual work and within the workplace. However, they hardly ever lead to unsubsidised labour. Many of the organisations and institutions providing training are financially unable to employ the fully trained CDEP participants. These people remain on their CDEP wages, without the perks they would otherwise have, such as long service leave, better sickness benefits, and superannuation.<sup>15</sup> In fact, many organisations and institutions, like the local school, are dependent upon CDEP-financed labour and could not function without it—thereby creating a vicious circle. Warlpiri people receive training and achieve some job autonomy but do not receive adequate wages (see also Nalliah, Ch. 28, this volume). This reduces job satisfaction and leads to poor levels of attendance.

Both the creation of unsubsidised employment in particular, and the provision of work for unemployed Indigenous persons in general, are challenging and complex issues in a remote community context. Furthermore, the transience of most of the non-Indigenous population in remote communities and the occupation of the most challenging job positions in communities by those persons are crucial structural issues. They need to be debated and resolved before viable and long lasting solutions can be developed. In the end, criticising CDEP for lack of success is like blaming a band-aid for being too small for the wound.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Ruth, Malcolm and James Japangardi Marshall at Yuendumu CDEP for their time, support and generous provision of materials, especially the graph. Thanks also to Valerie Napaljarri Martin and Tristan Ray at Warlpiri Media Association for discussing the first draft of this paper, and to Nicolas Peterson, Jon Altman and Diane Smith for reading and commenting on further drafts. Lastly, big thanks to Ian Bryson and Nicolas Peterson for almost presenting the paper at the conference for me when I had to extend my stay in central Australia.



2. The under-enumeration of Indigenous people has been discussed by Martin and Taylor (1995). In comparison to the relatively stable ABS population numbers the Health Centre Population Screening List gives a number of 930 residents at Yuendumu in October 1997 (Yuendumu Health Profile 1999).
3. In fact, every single organisation or institution operating at Yuendumu has non-Indigenous staff at the top managerial level.
4. At Yuendumu, people of mixed descent are classified as 'Yapa' (Indigenous) by both groups. Elsewhere a third category of 'yellafella' is recognised.
5. The contrast becomes particularly stark in statistical comparisons into health, rates of incarceration and deaths in custody, levels of unemployment, life expectancy, and education.
6. But see Martin and Taylor (1995) on the unreliability of ABS data in remote communities.
7. These ABS statistics were compiled before CDEP started at Yuendumu. There is no comparative data relating to the current situation to show the impact CDEP has had on employment figures. A study I conducted in 1999 (Musharbash 2000) was limited to 30 households (238 people) and caution should be exercised in generalising from these numbers. Of the sample population, 19 per cent of interviewees were on CDEP and 10 per cent were on wages. This suggests that for the 1999 sample population, in comparison to the 1996 total population, employment has risen by 10 per cent, although the increase in CDEP seems to have coincided with a decrease in work for wages. This has dropped by 9 per cent from 19 per cent to 10 per cent.
8. On the translation of the concepts of *kirda* and *kurdungurlu* into English see also Dussart (2000: 28) and Nash (1982).
9. This metaphorical translation seems particularly apt when one considers that ceremonies involve large-scale exchanges on various levels.
10. For a detailed ethnographic account and anthropological analysis of what 'to be boss' and 'to look after' mean, see Myers (1980a, 1980b, 1986, 1988).
11. To give an example cited by Myers: 'the particular conception of reciprocal obligation ultimately was what informed the Pintupi category of "boss" and the appropriate relationship implied by this designation; thus, their view of "work"'. Men often asked the Community Advisor . . . to drive them to Papunya . . . If he refused, whatever the reason he may have had, most men simply accepted the refusal. Not infrequently, however, men were heard to assert that the "boss" should help them because they worked for him: "I helped you build that fence"' (1980b: 319).
12. At Yuendumu, the only telephones to which most Indigenous people have access are three public telephones: one at the Women's Centre, one in the shop and only available during opening hours, and one often dysfunctional public telephone box in South Camp. Having a 'boss' who looks after one often simply means having access to a telephone when necessary.

13. All names used are pseudonyms.
14. Another constantly levelled accusation is that non-Indigenous people only come to Yuendumu to 'become rich,' that is their stay is seen to be for personal financial gain only.
15. In particular this applies to Warlpiri Media which trains in broadcasting, editing and filming; to the Child Care Centre; to the Old People's Program; and to the school.

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# 17. Outstations and CDEP: The Western Arrernte in central Australia<sup>1</sup>

*Diane Austin-Broos*

## Introduction

The issues bearing on remote communities, welfare, and economy are not new. Four of them frame this account of the Western Arrernte outstations and their CDEP schemes.<sup>2</sup> The outstation system is one of the largest in Australia. It developed from Ntaria, the erstwhile Lutheran mission of Hermannsburg that lies due west of Alice Springs and south of the MacDonnell Ranges in an arid but beautiful landscape.

More than a decade ago, Young noted that 'remote communities throughout Australia depend heavily on public subsidies for the provision of services' and, due to public sector employment, for a high proportion of family incomes (1988: 123). More recently, Taylor and Bell have remarked that lack of education, 'policy prescriptions and cultural preference' inhibit the migration of remote Aboriginal people (1997:408). The Western Arrernte are such a group. They have shown a marked reluctance to migrate although there is plenty of intra-regional movement between Ntaria, the outstation system, and Alice Springs. Staying mainly in one place, Western Arrernte people have passed from a situation of mission administered subsidy, through training wages and unemployment benefits (UB), to the current CDEP. This has occurred in the course of 40 years.

To the conditions of public subsidy and cultural reluctance to migrate, a third condition can be added: the corrosive impact of long-term dependency (see Pearson 2000; Sanders 1985, 1993). Today Western Arrernte people do not define themselves simply in terms of kin relations and ritual status. Issues of work role and occupational standing are also part of their identity. Nonetheless these sets of values can conflict. An outstation movement has not meant return to the old way of life, but at the same time, ties to aspects of that life make pursuing new values difficult. An impasse occurs in which people can neither return to the past nor find easy resolutions in the present. Welfare may not be intrinsically corrosive but the impasse it signals is debilitating. It undermines social cohesion, confidence and initiative (Peterson 1998).

The fourth and final pertinent condition is the limited economy of central Australia. Pastoralism was always tenuous and, especially west of the Stuart Highway, clearly a marginal industry even by the time of World War II. There is some mining and extensive natural gas deposits but not enough to constitute a major industrial complex. Alice Springs today is dominated by a variety of service industries to Aborigines, tourists, other residents, and the Pine Gap installation. Linked to these industries is the domain of national parks, land care and the like. These provide only modest employment and income for investment, in comparison with the royalty-rich parts of Arnhem Land. Moreover, these service industries have some notable features. Centralian tourism, like Third World

tourism, tends to import its requirements. It does not stimulate local manufacturing or primary production. Like the other service industries, tourism offers employment that requires high levels of literacy and personnel management skills. It is not a mass employer although it does generate demand for repair and maintenance (R&M) of roads, plant and equipment in addition to the R&M required on communities. Service industry in Alice Springs is partially pillarised. While whites work in Aboriginal organisations, most Aboriginal people are confined to Aboriginal service areas. Finally, small business is mainly service, retail or commercial, and based in Alice Springs. There is a notable lack of small business in the rural desert areas. In short, this is a limited economy focused on Alice Springs. Remote communities are very marginal and in general terms there are limited opportunities for Aborigines.

The fourth condition can be linked with the first in order to observe that public subsidy in forms such as CDEP is a prominent part of Western Arrernte life because the region is economically marginal, and would be marginal whoever lived there. By virtue of their history, Aborigines are further disadvantaged. This directs attention to the other two conditions: reluctance to migrate might be reduced by less subsidy but not much. Western Arrernte people remain where they are for reasons of cultural preference strengthened by their sense of a racialised environment beyond their own domain. They are not only different but also peripheralised. Better levels of education might change these preferences but desire for education rests in part on the opportunities it presents. In an economically marginal area, education lacks meaning and this is reflected in the tiny minority of Arrernte over the age of 15 engaged in further study (Papunya Regional Council (PRC) 1999:14).<sup>3</sup> Regrettably, high achievement is required to make the leap into town-based service industry. Overall then, life is hard. Public subsidy in the form of welfare brings low esteem in white society and many Western Arrernte care about this. It accentuates the sense of impasse and causes immense frustration.

My account of the Western Arrernte outstation system and CDEP is framed by these conditions. I focus on what is possible in this circumstance rather than on changing these conditions, some of which are intractable. In particular I am interested in initiatives that Western Arrernte people have taken to address their situation. I give a brief history of the outstations, describe some aspects of CDEP, note some problems, and offer some proposals.

## **The outstation movement and CDEP**

In 1979, after almost 90 years of continuous occupation, the Lutheran mission handed back its government lease to the Western Arrernte. Today, a population of over 900 is distributed between Alice Springs, Ntaria and 40 outstations on the old lease.<sup>4</sup> Roughly half the outstations are within a 25 kilometre radius of Ntaria and, as one Western Arrernte man observed, the outstation movement was more a 'decentralisation' from Ntaria than a 'land rights' movement as such. Nonetheless, there was a significant element of cultural revitalisation in the outstation movement. Rites that had not been performed for many years close to the mission were performed again and with public acknowledgment. The movement responded to initial steps towards self government at Ntaria (then

Hermannsburg) (see Sommerlad 1973). The attempt to revitalise rites was part of a larger concern with how to re-articulate Aboriginal authority in the wake of the mission order.

With growing Federal support in the 1970s, the movement quickened. In 1974 there were nine outstations, then 24 by 1976, and 33 by 1983 when the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre was established as an Aboriginal corporation. The resource centre was constructed across the Finke River from Ntaria and incorporated under the Federal *Incorporations Act 1983*. This was also the year in which Hermannsburg mission governance was replaced by an autonomous Ntaria council. The council is incorporated under Northern Territory legislation and receives municipal support as a community government. There were five more outstations by 1988, bringing the number to 38 in total. In that year Tjuwanpa and Ntaria both adopted CDEPs.

The original manager and staff of Tjuwanpa were lay Lutherans, the manager staying on at Tjuwanpa for more than a decade after the mission administration withdrew. In an Arrernte sense, he was a 'worker' for the man who many saw as the senior custodian for the country on which Hermannsburg was built. The new Ntaria Council chairman contested this custodian's position though the chairman had neither the support of senior Arrernte nor of their Lutheran brokers. He had gained his council position by virtue of his administrative skills and not through traditional status. The contest has now continued even into the next generation. As a consequence, Tjuwanpa and Ntaria have developed in tandem but with tensions and sometimes open conflict between them.

At the outset the Ntaria CDEP had 140 participants, but even by 1990 the number had declined to around 40 as people progressively transferred from Ntaria to the outstation scheme. Today the Ntaria project still numbers about 40 while the Tjuwanpa-based scheme has more than 300 participants. Ntaria's is a 'community based' project while Tjuwanpa, with its far-flung clientele, is an organisation with both centralised and decentralised aspects.

Tjuwanpa is the hub of the outstation scheme. The centre includes administrative offices, a garage, service station and parts shop, and a steelworks shop. It has a large meeting room, a vehicle compound, and two horticultural sites, the product of terminated projects. A Federal Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) grant supports the manager-accountant and a small number of clerical staff. CDEP support pays or contributes funds to the CDEP coordinator, two field officers, the building team staff and road building staff, as well as a senior vehicle mechanic and a land care officer. Further positions in building, mechanics and land care are paid from other sources including profits. A full-time grader operator is retained by the organisation. He bids successfully for regional contract work (see Nicholas, Ch. 25, this volume). In the past, the organisation also employed a full-time welder for the steel shop. The shop was set up a decade ago to make various furniture and fittings for outstation houses. All major housing construction was contracted out from the mid 1990s. Since that time, the Tjuwanpa steel shop has been less active though it still maintains a steady production of fence posts, bed frames, and the like.

Apart from municipal and CDEP management as such, the largest centralised project at Tjuwanpa is the building maintenance team, a DEWRSB Structured Training and Employment Project (STEP) aimed at self sufficiency. A similar STEP project is planned in contract road building and maintenance (see Nicholas, Ch. 25, this volume). The newly established women's centre is developing a meals project for the old and a sewing project to provide outstation curtains. Modest as this latter activity seems, it involves recycling house rental and a subsidy from the Infrastructure and Housing Authority of the Northern Territory to create a market for women's work that moves away from the notion of craft and recreation towards commercial activity.

Tjuwanpa retains about 30 full-time staff of whom eight currently are non-Indigenous. This includes the manager-accountant, two CDEP field officers, the payroll officer, and two mechanics. The CDEP co-ordinator and a number of 'team leaders' in the service station, steel shop, and roads and building maintenance are Aboriginal, including the grader operator. In addition, the Tjuwanpa management committee is entirely Aboriginal. This committee has 20 members who represent the various outstation administrative groupings. The committee oversees both the municipal and CDEP functions of Tjuwanpa. Outstation heads who act as supervisors for their respective outstation projects receive a loading as part of their fortnightly CDEP pay. They propose or delete CDEP participants for their outstations and sign the weekly work sheets.

Outstation activities include mustering and yard maintenance which involves extensive fencing. In the past few years small herds of cattle have been purchased by two outstations. There is more activity in feral animal mustering of brumbies, cattle, and camels. About four outstations are involved in this activity which is influenced by the price of beasts in relation to transport costs. The nearest abattoir at Bond Springs north of Alice Springs is not killing at present, and stock must be trucked across the continent. Horse meat is used for pet food and camel meat holds prospects for an export industry. Two outstations currently maintain commercial art or craft activities. Ironically, in 1992 Tjuwanpa failed to take up the option of managing the Hermannsburg Potters. Although it was feared that the group would be a burden, it is now a successful and internationally acclaimed enterprise. Three outstations in the system house small regional schools and teaching aides are recruited for these from their immediate vicinities. One outstation is involved in building maintenance under the leadership of the outstation head who is a skilled tradesman. One outstation maintains an alcohol rehabilitation program and a few outstations from time to time have been involved in gardening projects, generally not sustained. Most of these activities are intermittent and involve a small minority of those registered for CDEP. The majority of participants are listed for activities concerned with outstation maintenance, land care, or care of the old and young. Much though not all activity on many outstations is notional.

CDEP is the principal source of income for Western Arrernte people. The 1996 Census shows CDEP accounting for 78 per cent of the outstation labour force. Of this labour force, 16 per cent was unemployed, leaving only 6 per cent in other forms of employment (ABS 1998: 112). Most Western Arrernte people receive some royalty payments for Palm Valley gas reserves and/or a natural gas pipeline from Mereenie that travels across Western



Arrernte land. On balance, however, the Western Arrernte are not a royalty-rich group. Income from mining has not been sufficient to prompt Arrernte-wide incorporations. The income from Tjuwanpa's CDEP in the financial year 1998–99 was around \$3.8 million. In relation to UB, CDEP brings to Tjuwanpa both additional capital and operations support. It also brings the ability to manage income support on a family basis, important in funding outstation services. Managed saving is extensive at Tjuwanpa and is now being turned to fund maintenance and improvement projects that also create employment.

Within PRC, Tjuwanpa's is the largest of 12 CDEPs (PRC 1999: 15). The council's annual report for 1998–99 listed 335 participants for Tjuwanpa with the next largest being Yuendumu (135) and then Willowra (78). Overall Tjuwanpa's list accounts for about a third of the region's participants, and just over 27 per cent of regional CDEP budget allocations (PRC 1999: 27). In the Papunya Region, CDEPs have almost doubled in the last six years and PRC has a waiting list of communities (PRC 1999: 15). Regional conditions and its relative size place pressure on Tjuwanpa both to comply with ATSIC rules and also to develop profit-making concerns. The way forward is difficult, however.

### **Some problems in the outstation scheme**

Problems are so numerous that I propose to focus on just two areas: resources and management. The first condition for an outstation CDEP is that people actually be on their outstations and then, preferably, with meaningful activities. This baseline requirement is hard to realise. With a municipal CHIP grant of less than \$300 000 per annum, servicing the outstations is very difficult. The task includes maintaining access roads, generators, solar systems, bores, other forms of water catchment, houses, and other shelters. Inevitably the line between project initiatives and service maintenance is blurred, with CDEP staff spending most of their time on the latter. Palmer has described this dilemma in terms of 'a management style that is responsive and even . . . defensive, rather than strategic' (1998: 185), though this description hardly addresses the role and resource problems involved.

An important aspect of these resource issues is the maintenance of vehicles. The average life of a work vehicle is between three and four years, and it is common for such a vehicle to travel well over 100 000 kilometres in two years. During the past decade there has been a notable decrease in four-wheel-drive work vehicles attached to outstations and an increase in two-wheel-drive sedans, many of which have a very short life. An outstation group that lacks a vehicle will inevitably live for a period in Ntaria, although most such groups are normally away from Ntaria only for a few days at a time. Foraging and hunting are recreational pursuits now, and people are dependent on purchased food.

Vehicles are also crucial to Tjuwanpa. The pressures that bear on CDEP staff are due in part to the fact that they are constantly making decisions on the use of scarce vehicles. The pressing maintenance needs, especially of generators and solar systems, tend to be given priority thereby relegating supervision of outstation projects. Moreover, outstation heads, some of them management committee members, often request Tjuwanpa vehicles for personal use when their own vehicles are disabled. These requests are resisted, but not always successfully, heightening the scarcity of organisation vehicles.

Management problems also abound. At the local level, outstation heads who act as CDEP supervisors are also senior kin to those whom they supervise. There is no provision for training or support of these heads and one field officer cannot cover all the outstations on a very regular basis. Like its welfare counterparts, a CDEP offers to all participants a modest degree of autonomy. This makes it difficult for outstation heads to maintain authority either as CDEP supervisors or as senior kin who are required in any case to look after their relatives. This simply exacerbates a more general feature of wage support schemes: it is hard to sustain rewards on a graded scale for degrees of skill or work input. A few become stable wage or salary earners while the majority have little incentive to be other than minimum benefit recipients.

At the organisational level, Tjuwanpa's management committee has the substantial influence in hiring and firing the manager. However, beyond a growing sense of ATSIC-required accountability, members of this committee have had little engagement with the values and practice of asset management or commercial enterprise. As the management committee is comprised of outstation heads, the organisational and local dynamics tend to intersect. Outstation heads involved with the management committee are also involved in a resource politics to cater to kin through the acquisition of grants. The emphasis is on capital rather than on human capital accumulation. The manager must be keenly involved in acquiring grants. Yet grants are rendered mostly as forms of transitional benefit rather than as seed capital or assets. Land is the Arrernte's greatest potential capital asset. Its cultural significance and legal definition render it inalienable, however. These resource and management issues in conjunction with the limited possibilities of the region make it almost impossible for CDEP to work well. It is a substitute for economy rather than an economy itself, presenting a major challenge to Aborigines and non-Aborigines alike.

### **CDEP and the Western Arrernte: Some proposals**

When two CDEPs were established on Western Arrernte land, the Tjuwanpa scheme was attractive to many for a number of reasons. Many Western Arrernte sought autonomy from an Ntaria increasingly controlled by one particular family. Although new housing came gradually to the outstations, it was distributed more widely than housing in Ntaria. Vehicles were acquired through the Aborigines Benefit Reserve and its predecessors so that, at the outset, transport was accessible. Moreover, factors already mentioned meant a more limited capacity at Tjuwanpa to enforce the 'no work, no pay' rule that is operative in Ntaria. This provided false autonomy as workfare became welfare.

It is now evident that it is extremely difficult to resource the outstations and that resource and management problems make it unlikely that CDEP as presently organised can be an effective framework for outstation maintenance. At the same time, the lack of proper supervision on outstations has become destructive, especially for youth. Young people draw their CDEP pay from Tjuwanpa but spend most of their time in Ntaria and Alice Springs. These problems are exacerbated by the fact that Tjuwanpa is divorced from the settlement resources of Ntaria which sustains only a tiny CDEP in comparison with Tjuwanpa's project.

The populations of Ntaria and the outstation system are overlapping rather than separate. Most Ntaria residents have outstation relatives. People frequently move between an outstation on country and Ntaria, and Alice Springs. In fact it is difficult to imagine an outstation life that does not also involve Ntaria. The health clinic is there. Two supermarkets are there. The church is there and, although some outstations have their own regional schools, many outstation children attend the larger Ntaria school. Sporting facilities for youth, though meagre, are centred on Ntaria. A reintegration of these organisations within a single CDEP could produce a more effective use of Western Arrernte resources. Notwithstanding the political and cultural difficulties involved, it is of interest that recently Tjuwanpa's management committee has been thinking about a more regional approach to both CDEP and local government. Current negotiations on a joint approach to roads and local airstrips might be extended to housing, power, and other forms of maintenance.

These organisational issues also bear on CDEP and the local economy. It is unrealistic to assume that there can be equal activity on all outstations. Moreover, given the demands of supervision, most work that is not locality-based would be better centralised especially where that activity involves youth not concerned with the care of dependents. The outstation activities that are constant and successful to some degree are feral mustering, art and craft, and alcohol rehabilitation. Feral mustering might expand on both a domestic and export basis especially if there were a way to reduce prohibitive transport costs. Camel meat is an expanding export market for Australia and the domestic market for horse meat remains constant. The issue of regional infrastructure for these activities, including slaughtering and storage facilities, is worth a second look. These initiatives grow out of the pastoral industry but are fresh forms of activity. At the same time they employ well-established local skills, could be profitable, and are enjoyed by participants. Art and craft and rehabilitation are smaller concerns but each involves examples of local success and should be supported for this reason.

Tjuwanpa is currently negotiating contracts for 13 kilometres of walking trail in the Western MacDonnell Ranges and, following the successful Palm Valley land claim, Arrernte involvement in the Palm Valley tourist enterprise. The most viable local industry, however, is repair and maintenance of infrastructure both for communities and for the tourist trade generally. Further development of the building team and growth of the steel shop have potential for genuine enterprise. In conjunction with regional road contract work that would allow the Western Arrernte to engage with regional tourist infrastructural development, R&M could become a viable local industry. Such an aspiration would be more feasible if Tjuwanpa and Ntaria formed the core of a larger local government that integrated the service demands both of Ntaria and of the outstation system. Once again, these are activities that, on a smaller scale, have sustained some élan among workers as centralised projects. In conjunction with the administrative work required to run a settlement and outstation system these activities have the chance to realise real employment opportunity and possibly investment opportunity as well.

It may be that Ntaria and the outstation system can provide between them only a limited number of full-time equivalent positions for the resident population. If this is so, then it

should be acknowledged and attention given to other forms of support required by a remote community: how to improve school attendance, manage flexible employment, care for the aged, deal with substance abuse, and find constructive outlets for youth. Understanding and accepting that in marginal economies the lead time to any form of regular employment is quite long would be a helpful starting point. In short, this support requires careful and innovative thought, real resources, and national recognition that for the Western Arrernte and like populations, staying put in an economically marginal region is an option of Aboriginal citizenship and not an irrational response or a moral failing.

## Conclusion

I have not suggested horticulture for the Western Arrernte or the highly personalised 'home visit' tourism that has worked in some other Indigenous localities. My diffidence springs from the fact that in the last decade or so these activities have been tried as small businesses and petered out. I have focused on the more constant activities that Arrernte themselves engage with and enjoy. My proposal is that in enterprise, as well as on the larger issue of migration, the Western Arrernte make choices using their own local knowledge. It is now more important than ever to attend to and support those choices. For their own part, Western Arrernte must recognise that their own politics and practice do have implications for the younger generation. The intensity of family conflicts, and inability to build authority structures not dependent on encompassing orders, such as ATSIC, are major impediments in local development. Finally, I underline that education and work practice go together. Schooling and training become desirable in the company of opportunity, not in a social and economic vacuum.

## Notes

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2. Different orthographies are used in different communities of the Arandic-speaking area. 'Arrernte' and 'Arranda' are two currently used variants. In his contribution John Nicholas uses the latter, which corresponds to the practical orthography in use at Ntaria (Hermannsburg). The spelling Arrernte is preferred here.
3. The PRC reports that only 1 per cent of Aboriginal children in the region over the age of 15 years are pursuing further education. The statistic is not disaggregated according to language group. It is likely that the Western Arrernte figure alone would be a little higher than this.

4. The total population figure is produced from Ntaria Health Clinic statistics. Because these are calculated on regular visits over time, the resulting figure is more reliable than a census figure. This is not the total number of Western Arrernte in central Australia, but the number involved in regular interactions in and around Ntaria.

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## 18. CDEP in Victoria: A case study of Worn Gundidj<sup>1</sup>

***Raymond Madden***

In 1992, when Will Sanders looked at CDEP across the country (Sanders 1993), there were only two CDEP schemes in Victoria, both based in Gippsland in the east of the State. Since that time the scheme has expanded rapidly, and now there around 750 participants involved in about a dozen CDEP schemes across the State. The subject of this paper is a corporate CDEP scheme in Western Victoria which operates under the mantle of the Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Co-operative.

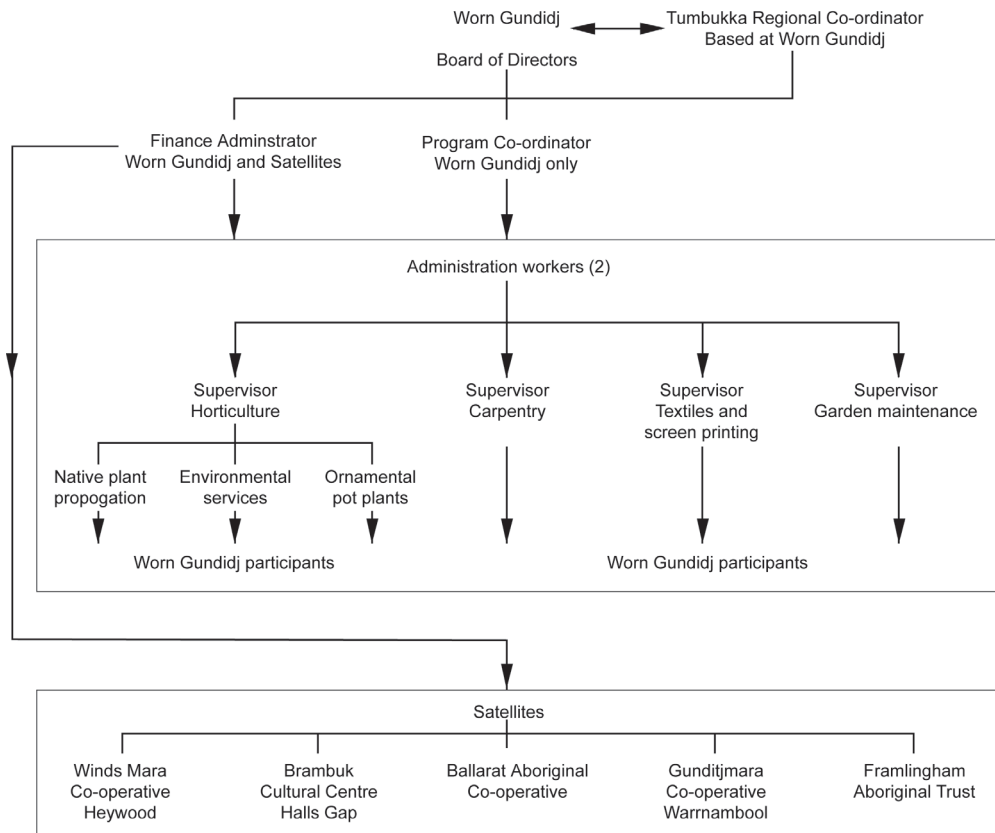
### **Worn Gundidj CDEP**

Worn Gundidj is located in Warrnambool, in south-west Victoria. Warrnambool is a rural city with a population of 28 000 people, and a rich agricultural hinterland. Through its light industry, retail outlets, government bureaucracies and educational facilities it services a wide area of the south-west. Warrnambool has two Aboriginal co-operatives: Worn Gundidj (CDEP), and Gunditjmara Aboriginal Co-operative. The Warrnambool Aboriginal community has strong links to the Framlingham community located about 15 kilometres to the north-east; indeed the bulk of Warrnambool's Aboriginal population either came from Framlingham, or had ancestors who came off the Framlingham Aboriginal Station.

As a corporate CDEP, Worn Gundidj has a central office that services a number of satellite schemes (also referred to as outstations in CDEP-speak). The central office is the grantee and has the responsibility for administering the scheme's wages, on-costs and the specialised software program 'CDEPManager'. However, the Worn Gundidj central office is not just an administrative arm; it also has its own work programs and participants.

The structure displayed in Fig. 18.1 represents the totality of Worn Gundidj's operations. I conducted fieldwork only in the Warrnambool-based section of the scheme and so will focus on that part of the scheme's operations. I will refer to the central office and its operations as 'Worn Gundidj' and to the outlying operations as the 'satellites'. Fig. 18.1 shows that Worn Gundidj has a board of directors and chair at its decision-making apex. It is fortunate to have a regional CDEP coordinator based at its offices, who also sits as a board member. At this level the scheme is dominated by Indigenous voices. Yet at the next level—the executive and administrative level—the picture is reversed. Only two out of eight of the executive positions of program coordinator, finance manager, administrators (including receptionists), and supervisors are occupied by Indigenous people. Below the work supervisors come the participants. Worn Gundidj has around 110 participants on its schedule, and of that total between 40 and 50 are employed at any one time through Worn Gundidj's central office. The rest are employed through the satellites or in hosted positions elsewhere in the State.

**Figure 18.1 Organisational structure of Worn Gundidj corporate CDEP, 2001**



## The Worn Gundidj work programs

The work programs undertaken by Worn Gundidj include three horticultural programs. One is devoted to the germination of native trees; the second concentrates on potted plants, both exotic and indigenous ornamental species. These are used to fill contracts with supermarkets and variety store outlets. The third program focuses on using the native trees and plants propagated on site to fill revegetation contracts—what Worn Gundidj calls Environmental Services. These work programs offer opportunities for participants to undertake a TAFE accredited horticulture course (Level II) or a horticulture apprenticeship. There are currently two participants undertaking horticulture apprenticeships at Worn Gundidj, and eight participants in accredited traineeships.



Worn Gundidj also has a carpentry program that undertakes private contracts, and maintenance around Worn Gundidj. This program offers participants either a place to undertake a carpentry apprenticeship, or basic training in building skills. Another work program is in textiles, and this stream of work can, like the horticulture, be combined with TAFE study in an accredited textile and screen-printing course. Here participants can learn the basics of dyeing, printing, assembling and designing for fabrics, and this work program allows artistic skills and culturally relevant design to flourish in a work environment. The final work program is a garden maintenance program which offers rubbish collection and gardening work in the local area.

## **The satellites**

The satellites are located throughout the south-west of Victoria, and their relationship to the central office is important to the overall picture. The satellites are pre-existing Aboriginal co-operatives or trusts which have used CDEP wages to fund their administrative functions and maintenance work. Some also send workers out on work sites with Worn Gundidj workers. A brief word on Victoria co-operatives might be useful here. Across the State of Victoria there exists a regime of Aboriginal co-operatives dedicated to delivering Aboriginal-specific services through health workers, drug and alcohol workers, housing programs, cultural heritage officers, and so on. These co-operatives are funded by a mixture of ATSIC and State government dollars, the mix depending on the service provided.

In recent years the co-operative system has experienced funding reductions and a rationalisation of such things, for example, as the number of cultural heritage officers and the number of cultural heritage zones (in other words, fewer officers with bigger areas to look after). These funding reductions led to a loss of administrative positions in these co-operatives, not just in south-west Victoria, but across the State. These changes affected their ability to deliver the services they are charged with providing (see also Bartlett, Ch. 20, this volume). Some went very close to shutting their doors altogether, and some relied on volunteer administrative staff to keep operating. The integration of a cluster of south-west Victorian Aboriginal co-operatives into the Worn Gundidj satellite system, with the purpose of accessing CDEP wages to fund administrative positions, means that those co-operatives now rely on State, ATSIC and CDEP dollars to deliver a full suite of services.<sup>2</sup> I return to the theme of organisational integration below.

The satellites remain, on a day-to-day working basis, independent of Worn Gundidj with respect to their work program tasks. The satellites receive an on-cost component with their wages, and Worn Gundidj extracts an administrative component from the overall on-costs and administrative stream. This degree of local autonomy, coupled with regional co-operation, suits both the satellites and Worn Gundidj and accords with local political and cultural units of power and territoriality. But as all the satellites operate under the one grantee, they can provide staff for Worn Gundidj contracts without having the trouble of changing schemes, or notifying Centrelink. This arrangement has been in force recently with a revegetation contract in Portland and Heywood, an hour's drive to the west of

Warrnambool. In this case the contract was secured by Worn Gundidj from Warrnambool, but as it is in another mob's country, according to local reckoning of territory, they regularly use Portland or Heywood labour on these jobs. This is put forward as the culturally appropriate approach to dealing with contracts in the country of satellites. Thus labour pooling is one aspect of the relationship between the satellites and Worn Gundidj in addition to the administrative linkages.

Flexibility of staff movement between the satellites, when the need arises, and the localised autonomy over the day-to-day work as exercised by the satellites, provide an effective structure which can accommodate the economic reality of the need for short bursts of intensive labour on some jobs, and having workers based around their local CDEP satellite *co-operative* at other times.

### **ABSTUDY, training and CDEP**

The management and directors at Worn Gundidj see the organisation not just as a place of employment, but also as a training and educational institution. The textiles work program at Worn Gundidj is an interesting example of this approach. The participants work their allotted CDEP hours per week (17.5 hours) but in addition a textiles and screen-printing course is delivered by the local TAFE college on site at Worn Gundidj. This qualifies as an accredited full-time course as it amounts to at least 14 hours per week, and therefore the participants are eligible for ABSTUDY. Although participants are not allowed to be on ABSTUDY when they come into the CDEP (they could not be classified as clients of Centrelink if they were in receipt of ABSTUDY), there is nothing to hinder them from going onto ABSTUDY once they have become employees of Worn Gundidj. In this manner Worn Gundidj can offer textiles participants both accredited training, and top-up money (in the form of ABSTUDY). Management at Worn Gundidj see this as a strong recruitment point, and it gives CDEP a real edge over Centrelink income support, especially for those adult participants who could get the same on income support, without having to work, as they would on CDEP. This training and top-up money cocktail has made the textiles program a vibrant hub of the organisation, as the classes and work are undertaken in the main office buildings. This work program, then, is in part dependent on ABSTUDY to make it a viable and attractive option for adult participants.

The other incentive that Worn Gundidj can offer is accredited certificates in horticulture for those participants under the horticulture work programs. Training for these participants is delivered by Wimmera and Grampians Group Training (a member of the Group Training Australia) who are based in Horsham. What is true of the textile stream is also true of the horticulture streams at Worn Gundidj—access to ABSTUDY dollars has made these programs very popular for both social and economic reasons. Thus, in these three work programs CDEP is closely linked to third party education and training providers, and is partly reliant on ABSTUDY dollars as a form of top-up.

## Relations with Centrelink

Worn Gundidj, like all other CDEP schemes, has had to cope with a major administrative change. As of the 1 March 2000, all CDEPs now have to have data linkage with their local Centrelink office, and all CDEP participants have first to be clients of Centrelink (and have a customer reference number). In order to ensure parity between CDEP and mainstream work for the dole schemes, and to make CDEP participants eligible for a raft of concessions available to mainstream Centrelink clients, a \$20.00 per fortnight supplement (CDEP Participant Supplement, or CPS) was made available to CDEP participants who became clients of Centrelink. This supplement was also payable retrospectively, to 1 March 1999, to those participants who had been on CDEP during that time. These payments came in two instalments known as 'retro one' (from March 1999 to September 1999), and 'retro two' (from September 1999 to March 2000).

This period of changeover threw a potentially serious administrative burden on Worn Gundidj (and on all CDEPs for that matter). Communication problems between Centrelink and Worn Gundidj led to a situation where Worn Gundidj only realised the extent of its responsibilities about three days before the final deadline for the CPS forms. Worn Gundidj then contacted Centrelink and began to negotiate a solution. It was pointless trying to get all the CPS claim forms and eligibility forms together in the time left—it was simply impossible to sign all their participants up with Centrelink in that time. The solution was that one of Worn Gundidj's administrative staff was seconded to Centrelink for two weeks to work on getting all the required paperwork completed. This person worked with the Centrelink Aboriginal Liaison officer and travelled to the satellites, gathering all the paperwork and bringing it back to the Warrnambool Centrelink office. This response to an administrative crisis was by all accounts very effective, and perhaps occasioned less waste of time and resources than if the changes had been managed over a longer period of time.

By having one of its employees inside Centrelink, Worn Gundidj was able to build a good relationship with two of Centrelink's officers who were charged with looking after the CDEP clients. Furthermore, the people involved in the rush to complete all the paperwork (both from Worn Gundidj and Centrelink) got, by default, an intensive course in what is required to manage data sharing between Centrelink and a CDEP scheme. Worn Gundidj now refers all its Centrelink enquiries to these two Centrelink officers, with whom they are able to communicate at a level of understanding that would not be possible if they were moved from one Centrelink officer to another. Another consequence is that Worn Gundidj is not reliant on the Centrelink Aboriginal Liaison officer, who is at times absent from the office on fieldwork to do with matters unrelated to CDEP. Having two office-based, well informed Centrelink staff to communicate with has meant that data sharing between Centrelink and Worn Gundidj is now a very smooth process, after what must have been a tumultuous initial period. Relations between Worn Gundidj and Centrelink are now described as very good, on/off notices and eligibility forms have 48-hour turn-arounds, and the system is now working as an ongoing process of data sharing rather than as crisis management.

## **Regional interdependence between Aboriginal organisations and CDEP funding**

In south-west Victoria it is apparent that CDEP has made linkages with other Aboriginal organisations that are above and beyond simply providing employment. Diane Smith, in her 1995 study of the Redfern CDEP, shows that this scheme was more than just an employment program, that it had broader social and cultural elements of community development (1995: 12–13). In Western Victoria, we are seeing the beginnings of inter-community development under the auspices of CDEP wages. Indigenous organisations in Victoria are on the verge of a regional, multi-community approach to the management of development dollars. Interdependence is fostered through the use by the satellites of CDEP wages to run administrative positions in Aboriginal co-operatives that have a number of functions, some of which are unrelated to CDEP. It would not be too far-fetched to suggest that the operation of these co-operatives might be severely impaired, if not imperilled, by the loss of their CDEP-funded administrative positions.

Another interesting synergy is the one between ABSTUDY-funded TAFE courses and some of the work programs in Worn Gundidj. If the link between ABSTUDY and CDEP wages were ever to be broken by any form of prohibition on taking up ABSTUDY after being in receipt of CDEP wages, some of Worn Gundidj's core operations would be under threat (they would survive, but in a diminished form). And if a series of funding and function interdependencies develops between Aboriginal organisations across the south-west of Victoria, as it appears to be doing, then a threat to the operations of Worn Gundidj may also pose a threat to the operations of Aboriginal service delivery co-operatives, and a number of Aboriginal-specific training schemes. Aboriginal organisation sets are interlocked in a regional funding puzzle. If any piece of the puzzle were to be withdrawn, there could be serious ramifications for Aboriginal self determination.

## **Policy implications**

The intermeshing, on a regional level, of CDEP schemes with other Aboriginal organisations creates policy implications. The challenge for policy makers is to understand the extent to which a decision regarding one stream of funding for Aboriginal development may affect another. For example, a change in the rules for ABSTUDY that precluded CDEP participants from being in receipt of it could have serious consequences for the operating size and viability of the Worn Gundidj enterprise. And because CDEP wages are used to fund administrative positions in other Aboriginal organisations in the region, any consequences of policy changes to CDEP may be felt across the region, above and beyond the constituency of CDEP participants alone. I am not suggesting that policy makers need to be able to make extra-CDEP decisions, or to go beyond the scope of what they see as their charter in formulating policy for CDEP. Rather, they should recognise that CDEP is more than an employment program, and that it has always had impacts beyond the income and labour force participation of individual participants. Furthermore, those who value CDEP need to be aware of its relationship to other Aboriginal endeavours, and be prepared to have input into the construction of policy for such things as training and education. The policy picture is complex indeed.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank the participants and management of Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Co-operative for generously giving of their time and thoughts in support of this research project. In particular I would like to thank John Collier and Max Hall for their support and comments. A fuller version of this paper was published as Madden (2000).
2. CDEP funding stems from ATSIC. However, for the purposes of this paper I make a distinction between non-CDEP ATSIC funding and CDEP funding.

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