

Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways: a literature review

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Foreword

Laurie Rivers worked with the CRC-REP from March 2011 until his sudden death in June 2012. He was a research officer with our Interplay Between Health, Wellbeing, Education and Employment and Pathways to Employment projects and was also writing for related project areas.

Laurie had almost completed this literature review when he passed away, and it is published in acknowledgement of his valuable contribution to research in this area. Laurie's passion for social justice and rich knowledge made him a respected member of our team.

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1. Overview

A variety of literature has been examined for ideas and examples of what has worked, or what has not worked in the arena of pathways to employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas. What works and what does not in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways cannot be understood mechanistically, outside of the context that inhibits or promotes success. Prospects of success are strongly conditioned by context: social, cultural, political and economic.

This paper also describes some of the research gaps and issues relating to employment pathways for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Future research priorities are suggested. Principles and practices required for success in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes are identified, and recent employment pathway developments are described. In the remote environment, employment success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been elusive. Recent commitments by governments, corporations and non-government service providers appear to have resulted in a significant increase (from an extremely low base) in employment pathway options for some remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The analysis presented here is not a *list* of examples of the notion of ‘what works’ in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment initiatives. Particularly in remote contexts, what works has been overshadowed by what does not work. There are various reasons why ideas, plans or intentions do not work. It is important to understand them, if we are going to escape from the vicious circles of ‘doing what we have always done’ and expecting different results. Reviewing obstacles to success provides empirical grounds for practice and experiment. Past, present and potential future obstacles provide the material background to strategic and theoretical problems that need to be solved if progress is to be sustained.

The focus of the review is very much on the Northern Territory, but observations from other jurisdictions are noted where appropriate.

The paper attempts to cover issues that will require strategic policy research to make a difference to future activities aimed at increasing remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. It is about the issues we must come to terms with – and frequently attempt to resolve – when selecting questions for research, and when making research design choices.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment disadvantage – social contexts

To sensibly discuss remote training and the difficulties of achieving successful employment outcomes, it is necessary to define its social context. This can be summarised in the terms ‘extreme’ and ‘locational’ disadvantage.

Extreme disadvantage has been defined as ‘a combination of low incomes, poor access to education, health and other services’ (Hayward-Jones and Copus-Campbell 2009, p. 1). The factors apply across remote Australia, particularly when compared with conditions of life in capital cities and regional centres.

Locational disadvantage has the added dimension of geography. It is defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as ‘area-level disadvantage’. An ABS paper says that:

Area level disadvantage is related to the characteristics of the community or neighbourhood as reflected in the attributes of the people living in that area. These

characteristics may also be related to a lack of social and public resources, or characteristics which limit the access of residents to material resources or their ability to participate in society. More disadvantaged areas may lack employment opportunities, educational facilities, or transport infrastructure. There may also be an inadequate stock of housing [and] low levels of social capital ...

(ABS 2007, pp. 4–5)

ABS defines socio-economic disadvantage in terms of an individual's access to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society. The employment pathways literature highlights obstacles to success that result in large part from the locational disadvantage overlaid on socio-economic disadvantage that remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience.

In some remote places there are few government agency jobs and fewer private sector jobs. The lack of available jobs creates a challenge for educators and training organisations. Adaptive approaches are needed so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can realise their potential in the light of there being few local employment opportunities. In exercising limited choices, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may seek to do this through further education, or through training for employment in self-owned or community-owned enterprise.

The neo-liberal economic policy framework of the past thirty years resulted in poor economic development outcomes in remote regions. The systemic nature of the interactions means that this leads to poor employment outcomes. Lack of employment opportunities in remote areas has resulted in undeveloped human capabilities and poor wellbeing. However, the view that remote people desire or need a traditional full-time job in the same way as people who live in more settled areas can be contested. Characteristic of many remote places in the world is that people need to be multi-skilled and pluri-active. *There is a need for research that determines the role for pluri-activity in remote settlements.*

With a few exceptions, such as the remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and recent pastoral programs, the post-mission period of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development' yielded few jobs for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Unemployment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was extreme and chronic. In economic terminology, it appears to some observers that what was occurring was 'de-development' – as community gardens, bakeries, abattoirs and cattle companies failed and disappeared.

Current economic development challenges are to revive these types of enterprises and develop new ones. This is extremely difficult because chronic lack of opportunities to develop work preparedness and lasting job skills has led to skill and behaviour barriers to future workforce participation by remote people. Recent initiatives are seeking to overcome these barriers. Research about these barriers is limited. *There is a need for new research to assess what difference recent initiatives are likely to make to employment outcomes and prospects.*

The recent mining boom has changed the remote employment context in regional areas associated with large-scale mining sites. There is demand for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees to work in mine operations or associated services. But the needs of the resource companies are immediate and the current skills base to meet such a large demand in remote Australia is low.

Government policies such as Closing the Gap articulate aspirations about jobs for remote populations. Government services and government-funded services in remote areas are slowly increasing employment opportunities for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in some occupations and regions.

Employment pathway activities are often considered as ‘successful’ if remote students are achieving basic learning benchmarks at school, and moving into post-school work or training. Such criteria are likely to be insufficient for the informed judgement required to develop new programs and policies to facilitate future success. In section 3 of this paper I put forward criteria for assessing employment pathway experiences and the quality of their contribution.

Lack of economic development has inhibited remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. The aim of increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in remote regions is grounded in the concept of equal rights to wellbeing. The right to work, sanctioned by the United Nations from its beginning in the post–World War II period, is a crucial but insufficient aim for creating wellbeing. It has been enhanced by the concept of the right to *decent work*, developed from policy research of the International Labour Organisation (ILO 1999). Indicators of what constitutes decent work will help all stakeholders develop employment pathways with appropriate qualitative aims and results.

2.1 CDEP Program

In the past thirty years the main employment pathway available to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program (McRae-Williams & Gerritsen 2010, p. 2). CDEP projects were intended to prepare remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for modern work practices, but there has generally been no transition to ‘mainstream’ work. In the Northern Territory ‘growth towns’ (larger Aboriginal communities), and their Queensland, South Australian and Western Australian equivalents, some ‘real jobs’ are replacing formerly CDEP-based work.

Miller (2005, p. 20) says that:

It is difficult to fully quantify employment outcomes achieved through training by Indigenous people. This is predominantly a result of the variable recognition of paid and unpaid employment, the role and scope of the Community Development Employment Projects scheme and different cultural constructions of ‘work’.

CDEP work projects have frequently become the destination point of training outcomes, rather than the job-training program providing a transition into modern ‘market-economy’ jobs. In remote communities this has resulted in invidious work entitlements compared with those in mainstream Australian employment systems. Industrial conditions of work guaranteed to other Australian workforce employees – such as the minimum wage, leave and superannuation entitlements – have been mostly absent in the working conditions of CDEP-based work projects of the last thirty years. However, CDEP is changing.

Under the ‘National Partnership for Indigenous Economic Participation, Closing the Gap targets’:

Funding of \$228.8 million over five years has been committed to create sustainable Indigenous employment opportunities. Up to 13,000 Indigenous Australians will be assisted into employment over four years through the creation of waged market jobs from Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program positions that have subsidised government service delivery ... and other priority reform areas. Implementation will commence in 2009, with the rollout of jobs converted from CDEP to be completed by 1 July 2009 (FaHCSIA 2009).

These jobs are referred to as ‘CDEP conversion’ and ‘CDEP transition’ jobs. CDEP is retained as a program but has been restructured into two activity streams of work readiness and community development (FaHCSIA 2012). The Australian Government has provided around \$20 million to support

wages and on-costs for CDEP-converted jobs for sixteen of the largest Aboriginal communities, matched by the Northern Territory Government.

2.2.1 Training and work preparation contexts

The past thirty years has seen determined efforts on the part of governments and training providers to extend vocational training opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Despite overall increases in funding for employment training, programs have been difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access and for training providers to deliver.

Remote Vocational Education and Training (VET) program participants refer to rigidity of guidelines (pers. comm. conversations with remote VET participants). Capital city formulas for resourcing VET programs have constrained training resources allocation. Remote stakeholders have worked hard to gain the resources needed to subsidise the higher costs for training delivery. Costs of addressing the effects of extreme disadvantage and remote location are not appropriately covered in program funding formulas.

Young and Guenther (2008) note that:

Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality, and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth ... disadvantage is experienced across all sectors of education, and although Aboriginal students are participating at high rates in vocational education and training, their pass rates and qualification outcomes remain well below those of non-Aboriginal Australians.

It is difficult to raise pass rates in the absence of real job prospects for the graduates. Employment outcomes in remote VET are often below expectations. Lack of job outcomes can be attributed to a failure of various remote regions to participate in economic development.

Reinert (2007, pp. 230–231) makes the point that:

Superficially it may seem that what poor countries need above all are better educated people. This is, of course, also true, but successful cases of economic development prove the importance of simultaneously providing not only a flow of better educated people, but also jobs where their skills are demanded. Such a coordinated effort, matching both the supply and demand of educated people, is the hallmark of successful development policies.

Such strategies have always required massive departures from laissez-faire policies. Nations that only address the supply of educated people end up educating for migration.

A similar logic can be applied to regions on the ‘poor periphery’ of a ‘developed’ nation.

Wallace and Boyle’s (2010) study has relevance to Reinert’s argument. It suggests that ‘available or potential work opportunities may not be identified when planning training’ in some remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET programs. Those ‘work opportunities’ may be unavailable in the regional environment. *Research needs to examine why such participants in remote VET programs have not gained subsequent employment.*

2.3 Training delivery contexts

Primarily through VET funding, remote training programs evolved in what could be described as a ‘de-development’ economic context – a situation in which remote regions have suffered economic decline despite considerable national economic growth.

An Australian Government report says that ‘Economic decline was most common among agricultural regions with a relatively small population base ... Economic growth appears closely tied to a region’s level of remoteness, with economic growth highest in the major cities’ (BTRE, 2005, p. 2). Moran (2009) laments the ‘low levels of development of infrastructure in remote Australia.’ He says that this means that:

Remote Aboriginal settlements operate in an extreme economic context, arising from limited economic opportunities, the small size of settlements, large distances between settlements, a lack of institutional capital, and high levels of mobility between and within settlements.

SGS (2003, p. 5) reports that ‘Many jobs disappeared from rural areas and the accumulation of wealth went to fewer, corporate hands. The capacity of regions to accumulate wealth has in many places diminished’.

In this scenario the VET training system evolved around a variety of influences. These included a desire for job training, but few job opportunities; a desire to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and land obligations through training; and a desire to engage communities to fill the leadership gap left by the withdrawal of Church and State from remote community development.

In the complex arrangements that emerged, the state delivered some employment programs, with a plethora of non-government providers also providing VET services. In the Northern Territory, where Aboriginal-focused VET programs constitute a greater proportion of employment training delivery than they do in other jurisdictions, the system has developed its own strengths and weaknesses.

The Northern Territory Government oversees funding and training of apprentices and trainees, and develops ‘community responsive’ training initiatives. It purchases services from public and private training providers. For remote Aboriginal people there are four regional and ten remote training centre facilities. Six of the remote centres are in the identified service-delivery ‘growth towns’ of Angurugu, Galwin’ku, Maningrida, Milingimbi, Yirrkala and Yuendumu. Training is commissioned by communities negotiating directly with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), who market their services to communities.

There are over 140 other RTOs operating (and competing) in the Northern Territory. There are approximately 70 Northern Territory-based RTOs, of which 15 deliver about 30% of the training in remote areas. Driven in some cases by providers, in others by communities, training is frequently unconnected to job outcomes. Comments are often encountered in remote communities about a system that provides ‘training for training’s sake’.

The small and relatively stagnant remote economic and employment base means that *employment-related* training investment is less required than would be the case in a growing economy. Available training funds flow to a wider variety of training experiences.

3. Learning from the literature on remote training

Mainstream vocational training is frequently about developing generic, widely applicable work skills; it is often industry based, with prominence given to industry- skills or firm-specific skills. Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways literature has a less discrete focus, as is illustrated below.

3.1 Principles and planning

Miller (2005, p. 5) has surveyed literature on remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training and employment and concluded that ‘seven key factors lead to positive and improved outcomes’. The factors he identifies provide a checklist for planning and assessing employment pathway programs. These factors are:

- community ownership and involvement
- the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, cultures, knowledge and values
- the establishment of ‘true’ partnerships
- flexibility in course design, content and delivery
- quality staff and committed advocacy
- extensive student support services
- appropriate funding that allows for sustainability.

A useful addition to the checklist could be a ‘guaranteed job outcome’ upon successful completion of training and work experience/preparation, as anecdotal evidence suggests that this can make a real difference to success or failure of the trainee and the program. *Further research is needed to evaluate and refine these success conditions, and to assess the value of the ‘guaranteed job outcome’ approach.*

Authors Wallace and Boyle (2010, p. 2) add a ‘community’ perspective about how successful employment-related activities should be planned and conducted. They emphasise the importance of:

- drawing on cultural and corporate governance models
- planning learning experiences as a part of community-based work and life
- recognising the different purposes that people have for participating in learning
- understanding and working within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols
- establishing environments that promote flexibility and bridging knowledge systems.

Public sectors – state, territory and commonwealth – were, until recently, the main institutions in which planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees’ training, induction and retention took place. A result was government targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in government agencies. These targets aimed to reflect a designated proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the total population of employees. In the Northern Territory, for example, the target is 10%, which reflects the proportion of Aboriginal people in the Darwin population (Northern Territory Government 2010).

In remote regional areas, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in public sector employment is very small, and well below their proportion of the regional population. This is beginning to change. The 2011 Northern Territory Government Budget provided funding to increase the creation of additional environmental ranger positions for remote Aboriginal workers. Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Minister Mr Hampton said that ‘about 22% of the Parks and Wildlife staff, or 37 rangers in total, are Indigenous and this Government aims to increase this percentage to 30% to reflect the demographics of the Northern Territory population within the next five years through better training and employment opportunities’ (Hampton 2011).

Change is occurring in other industries, most prominently in mining. To assist companies with strategic planning, Tiplady and Barclay (2007a, p. 3) have developed an ‘Indigenous Employment Evaluation Tool’,

consisting of a set of model procedures that outline a management framework for inducting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees into a mining workforce. A model framework of the tool processes is provided by the authors, and the tool contains detailed checklists to enable companies to benchmark their success and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment objectives within corporate plans. At the time of conducting this literature review, one of the authors of the tool said there was no research available about its uptake and use by mining companies (pers. comm. report author, Mary Anne Barclay, 6 May 2011).

3.2 Project approaches and rationales

Davies et al. (2008) developed a model project rationale within a livelihoods framework which was adapted from the international development literature. They note that ambivalence about jobs in comparison with other livelihood activities is evident in some of the literature, with a de-emphasis on jobs, in favour of the concept of livelihoods. Davies et al. suggest that the livelihood approach may fit better with the desires of community leaders and members.

Other proponents of the livelihoods approach are reported to advocate a more extensive application of the approach, to replace ‘mainstream development thinking’, which was described as tending to promote the rich instead of the poor (Chambers 1987, cited by Davies et. al. 2008).

Veracity of the criticism depends upon what you understand as mainstream development thinking. Such criticism rings true for theories that have underpinned development aid delivered by the World Bank and other similar institutions in the period since the mid-1970s. Crucially, it is not true of the economic development theories that supported policies pursued by a range of countries immediately after World War II. These promoted large increases in employment, income and wellbeing of poor people.

Future research might profitably examine how the livelihood approach and the Post WWII Economic Development (PWWIED) approach – as articulated by Myrdal, the 1974 winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics – could be merged in a new approach to remote economic development. Livelihood models have focused on the importance of community engagement. They emphasise relationship equality and explore socio-cultural dimensions of remote Indigenous lives. The PWWIED approach emphasises the importance of getting the right economic structures in place. Both approaches are ‘systems thinking’ based, and aim to embrace the complexity of interconnections between issues. *Research could integrate methods and approaches of both PWWIED and livelihood paradigms.*

Such research on strategic approaches to remote Aboriginal economic development can inform improved policies and better project planning activities. Place-based research applications of an integrated paradigm might help to transcend an apparent dichotomy between Aboriginal culture and mainstream work.

3.3 Role of partnerships

Wallace and Boyle (2010) emphasise the importance of VET ‘learning partnerships’ with remote communities, and identify several themes for success. These involve:

- ... drawing on cultural and corporate governance models; planning learning experiences as a part of community-based work and life; recognising the different purposes that people have for participating in learning; understanding and working within Aboriginal cultural protocols; and establishing environments that promote flexibility and bridging knowledge systems.

They also emphasise ‘the shared ownership of learning and relationships that underpin learning partnerships.’ In the recent period a number of training and employment partnerships have been developed by remote stakeholders. Remote areas will be likely to benefit from the development of collaborative and joint-planning capacities of partnership group members.

Wallace and Boyle (2010, p. 10) suggest that ‘training partnerships between Indigenous people, industry representatives and registered training organisations have at their core a focus on developing positive training and employment outcomes for Indigenous people.’ While partnerships can be resource intensive, the development of collaborative and problem-solving skills may be a necessary component of progress in remote training and employment outcomes.

3.4 Recruitment and retention

Recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the remote mining industry has been slow and difficult. To overcome the obstacles, Tiplady and Barclay (2007) have identified that some mining companies have developed recruitment strategies that:

- focus on face-to-face rather than written communication with potential applicants
- use selection centre workshops to identify individual skills and abilities
- adopt flexible strategies to manage problems with drug and alcohol use
- develop work readiness programs that prepare Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the transition into the mainstream workforce
- provide cultural awareness training for *all* recruits as part of the induction process.

They also suggest that retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees requires:

- provision of ongoing mentoring and support
- more flexible work rosters
- provision of career development opportunities
- provision of family support
- addressing racism in the workforce.

The need to address obstacles to mining contractors developing and maintaining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is a key mining industry recruitment issue. It has been proposed that the associated costs of doing this should be reflected through recognition (and incentives) in mining companies’ tendering practices.

Tiplady and Barclay (2007) note that retention is a significant problem for remote mining companies, in which more than one in five mining industry employees (22%) had been employed for less than one year. The turnover rates in remote operations are even higher.¹ Increased mining activity since 2007 may mean some companies will have experienced higher turnover figures.

In the mining industry research, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce participation is affected by:

- education

¹ Retention figures apply to all staff. There were no separate figures available for Aboriginal staff retention rates.

- cultural differences
- cultural communication issues
- family relationships
- health and social aspects
- social and geographic isolation.

(Tiplady & Barclay 2007, p. 12)

These factors should also apply in other industries.

A survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who had left mining employment was undertaken in 2010 by the Queensland Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRSM), in part to ascertain why they left, although in 2011 a CSRSM researcher suggested there was, as yet, little hard data available about the key questions (pers. comm. Mary Anne Barclay from UQ, CSRSM, 9 May 2011). CSRSM reported that some data were available from company information that shows an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in mining in the 2000s. *More research is required.*

Recruitment and retention is a problem in the health industry. Remote areas experience recruitment and retention problems for all health positions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care organisations in the Northern Territory reported vacancy levels of 10%, which was comparable with very remote areas of Australia at 9.5% and major cities 6% (NATSIHC 2008, p. 32).

4. Learning from recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment projects and pathway experiences

Growth of job opportunities for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has occurred in recent years. Governments, corporations and the social enterprise sector now seek to employ remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mining, pastoral industry, housing, local government, ranger services, education and community services. Success or failure of these employment initiatives is difficult to judge on the basis of currently available evidence. It is often too meagre, too short term, and/or too new.

Longitudinal research on Aboriginal employment satisfaction and retention is lacking. The need for it is increasingly recognised.

Some issues that have been worked on by stakeholders participating in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment include skills training and development, work readiness training, school-to-work transition learning activities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise development, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural training for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers and managers.

The mining industry, particularly in Western Australia, has created models of training, community engagement, and partnership, with some success. In conjunction with regional communities and governments, key mining companies have created school- to-work transition programs, work readiness training, mentoring and support, and employment for Aboriginal people. Resources extraction companies are evolving strategies for their future skill needs that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, drawing more employees from local and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The past five years have seen a flourishing range of corporate social responsibility initiatives.

The pastoral industry has also seen the creation of training models. With the Northern Pastoral Industry (NPI) experiencing labour shortages, in 2007 Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), and the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) commissioned a study that reviewed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and engagement and evaluated support services available in the NPI (Josif et al. 2009). The review noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the NPI had declined for a long period of time, and social wellbeing problems among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups had increased. It found that five factors were critical for success in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes:

- a pastoral manager who has strong cross-cultural awareness
- workplace mentoring
- pre-employment assessment and drug and alcohol screening of trainees
- presence of appropriate training and employment pathways
- pastoral managers and companies committed to Aboriginal employment.

The pastoral review found that principles recommended in mining industry studies and planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement in industry (Tiplady & Barclay 2007) were also applicable in the pastoral industry. As a result of this review, training programs were developed, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the industry has gradually increased.

The remote health industry has provided a significant number of employment opportunities for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Work by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services was conducted on primary health care development in remote areas. This led to successful employment and training strategies, creating a community health worker labour force with an industrially recognised employment category of ‘Aboriginal health worker’ (AHW). In 2008, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accounted for 95.5% of AHWs (NATSIHC 2008).

Successes in developing health employment pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also reflected in census data, which show that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have high participation rates in the VET sector. In 2006, 67,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were undertaking VET courses and qualifications. The largest numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students for each year (2001–2006 inclusive) were enrolled in public health courses (NATSIHC 2008).

AHW positions have been a major employment pathway in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These positions are widely viewed as an important way to provide services, especially to communities in remote locations (HCA 2009, p. 4). In the Northern Territory, pathways to Aboriginal employment in remote health for AHWs are less likely to be subject to arbitrary outcomes and employment uncertainties than other jobs. There are known numbers of positions, an associated volume of training, and an aggregate shortage of workers for funded positions. Their geographic distribution is broadly in line with the sizes of distributed Aboriginal populations.

This model could be applied to other types of remote work. Creation of pathways to employment for AHWs is perhaps the best example of success in creating valued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes in remote areas. In 2009 there were 245 AHWs employed in government and community-controlled health services in the Northern Territory (HCA 2009). Community-controlled organisations employed 122 of this total.

Despite these numbers, a reviewer of remote health services has suggested that the number of AHWs employed in the Northern Territory should in fact be much greater to increase the impact such workers have at the remote health service interface (HCA, 2010).

4.1 Work readiness and pre-employment programs

Research has shown that there is only a limited pool of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are ‘work-ready’, and as a result a number of mining companies (in particular) are investing in a range of work readiness or prevocational schemes to prepare Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees for the workforce (Tiplady & Barclay 2007).

Work readiness programs have been hailed as a major development in providing pathways into employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, providing practical work skills and experience in holding a regular job. They also teach literacy and numeracy, and provide job-relevant training in health and safety. ‘Work readiness’ is noted as a key theme in many new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment projects (CME 2010). Some examples include:

- The Newmont Tanami mining operation in the Northern Territory, after experiencing poor participation and completion rates for work readiness, developed a new training program. Improved success is reported to have occurred as a result of attention to factors including mentoring support, literacy and numeracy support, and job rotation (Tiplady & Barclay 2007).
- Minerals and Metals Group (and partners) conducted a ‘Bayalgu Indigenous Pre-Employment Training’ pilot program in 2006–2007, completed by 22 young Aboriginal people. The ten-week course included induction, work simulation, work experience and employment transition. The employment transition ratio is reported to be 90% (CME 2010).
- Rio Tinto supports a ‘Work Ready Program’ in collaboration with Pilbara TAFE, CDEP and Job Futures Network, operating in Roebourne and Tom Price. Participants receive training in occupational health and safety, receive tickets and licences, learn to operate small machinery, training in writing resumes and job applications (Rio Tinto 2012).
- A program has been developed by the Northern Territory division of Minerals Council Australia (MCA), in conjunction with Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), for pre-employment training for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people interested in working in the mining sector. Selection of students involves pre-employment screening by training providers (pers comm. Chris Natt, Training and Education Coordinator, NT MCA, 16 May 2011). The program was funded to provide one week of residential training at BIITE near Darwin, one week on-the-job competency training at a mine site, and one week off. The course ran for eight cycles of work-readiness training (MCA – NT Division 2010).

4.2 Mentoring

Mentoring has become an essential strategy for success at integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members into the mining workforce. Such mentoring should address the ongoing development needs of the employee, be conducted both inside and outside the workplace, and include capacity building within the community if it is to be sustainable (CME 2010, p. 2). Mentoring is reported to have increased in the mining and cattle industries, as well as in the public sector. *More data needs to be collected for an accurate picture of the use of this strategy.*

4.3 Developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise

Successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise development is a key objective for remote economic development strategies. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian Government and the MCA aims to support mechanisms that develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises around mining services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment activity (Australian Government & Minerals Council of Australia 2011). There have been recent increases in enterprise development and activity in the mining sector, which increase the prospects for Aboriginal employment.

In Western Australia partnerships between the resource industry and Aboriginal communities are creating joint ventures, such as the following reported by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy (CME 2010):

- BHP Billiton operates an Indigenous Training Academy as a joint venture with Ngarda Civil and Mining Pty Ltd (Ngarda), an Aboriginal mining services company. It employs 150 Aboriginal people, with a minimum Aboriginal employment ratio of 50%, and provides services to BHP, Woodside and Rio Tinto.
- A joint-venture was commenced in 2009 between Kimberley Diamond Company (KDC) and Bunuba Inc. to develop the newly formed Kimberley Mining Services Pty Ltd to provide mining services as a contractor to KDC.
- Aboriginal-owned, -managed and -operated, Burrna Yurral Aboriginal Corporation (BYAC) Contractors provides contract labour to mining and regional industries in the Western Australia's north-east goldfields region.
- Doorn-Djil Yoorandaning Mining and Construction is a contracting business that engages or partners with local Aboriginal companies. Its aim is to increase Aboriginal employment and training in mining services, through joint ventures or alliances.

There is much interest in what makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises succeed. Myuma Group is a Queensland example of success in its regional environment. Located at Camooweal near the Queensland–Northern Territory border, the Myuma Group of Aboriginal companies was set up in 2000 as an enterprise to reap social benefits for local Aboriginal people from a native title agreement. It has different enterprise activities, a philosophy of Aboriginal ownership, group–family centredness and is community-controlled.

According to Memmott (2010), Myuma's gross turnover is an indicator of success: it grew from \$8 million in 2007–2008 to \$10 million in 2009–2010, winning industry awards along the way. He evaluates Myuma's success factors as:

- the leadership skills of its Managing Director
- two-way respect with government, enabling the company to successfully lobby for contracts
- negotiation of tailored contracts
- Aboriginal-run and -controlled work camp, where trainees learn, and personal services are accessed by them
- having real jobs for the Aboriginal trainees as soon as they are adequately prepared through pre-training.

As a result government agencies and corporations such as Rio Tinto have come to trust Myuma's ability to deliver services and produce work-ready employees.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises could be assisted by the planning and integration of contract schedules and service delivery plans by governments implementing large multi-year projects. The aim of sustaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment may be enhanced by appropriate spacing of work on projects such as remote housing and remote non-housing infrastructure, to create an integrated services procurement model.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise also exists in the health services industry. There are over 100 Aboriginal community controlled-health services in Australia, funded by governments (Lutschini 2005). A significant proportion of them are in rural and remote areas, and these social enterprises provide significant employment pathways for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (see above). The successes and resilience of Aboriginal health services in the Northern Territory is reported by them to be based overwhelmingly upon what makes them different from ‘mainstream’ health services: the constitutions and practices to ensure community control of the health service (AMSANT n.d.).

The Northern Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental services employment capacity building network organisation. It is associated with facilitating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways in the environmental services industry, in particular the Caring for Our Country program. NAILSMA has achieved success through the expansion of land and sea ranger programs. Its successes as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social enterprise are also significantly attributable to its philosophy of ‘community control’ (NAILSMA 2012). Prospects for sustainable success of this program as an employment pathway for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people appear to be positive, but optimism should be cautious. May (2010, p. 8) suggests that:

The Working on Country program presents both opportunities and challenges for the future of Indigenous land and sea management. DEWHA have committed significant funding to support the program and has responded to calls from Indigenous land and sea managers for funding for paid positions, which is helping to deliver local employment outcomes and providing much needed workforce stability until 2013 ... funding arrangements are currently extremely complex and fragmented. The funding sourced from other government departments has been based on reactionary measures and needs to be transformed into long-term commitments.

May (2010) also argues that while these programs have received wage support from government environment departments, the support is ‘siloes’, and that ‘whole of government’ support is required to ensure the sustainability of the approach. In 2010 there was sufficient funding for 300 ranger positions under the Working on Country program: 169 positions under the Northern Territory stream, 100 regional positions, 60 flexible positions and 32 trainee positions’ (up to 2013).

4.4 Partnership approaches

The use of partnerships has occurred to develop pathways to employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some examples include:

- An Indigenous Mining Skills Program, piloted in 2006, which is ‘a joint initiative of BHP Billiton Iron Ore, Macmahon Contractors and Pilbara TAFE. All nine participants completed the program successfully in its first year (Tiplady & Barclay 2007, p. 33)

- Newcrest Mining’s Telfer Goldmine (opened 2005) has formed an alliance with the local Martu people, which the Chamber of Minerals and Energy refers to as ‘a holistic partnership approach’. The company has developed a skills register and a community-based Healthy Lifestyle Program (CME 2010, p. 18).
- The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) operates nine successful pastoral and tourism businesses that deliver training and employment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in these industries. These businesses annually employ more than 200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in full-time and seasonal work and host 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees.
- The Indigenous Pastoral Program (IPP) in the Northern Territory and the Kimberley Indigenous Management Support Service (KIMSS) in Western Australia operate in partnership with the Northern Territory and Western Australian Governments (ILC 2008). Its operating model involves:
 - industry-based training and industry-standard wages
 - board and accommodation
 - training that follows the Australian Quality Training Framework
 - accredited courses and vocational and technical education
 - mentoring, placement into mainstream businesses, and post-placement support.
- A WA Government partner organisation, the Indigenous Landholder Service (ILS), was awarded the Public Sector Commission Premier’s Award in 2010. The focus of the ILS is to rebuild Aboriginal properties, which gives immeasurable subsequent benefits to the environment, business, culture, health and harmony (WA Government 2010).
- The Australian Employment Covenant is an initiative launched in October 2008. Its goal was to create 50,000 jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in two years. In July 2011, Covenant founder ‘Twiggy’ Forrest was quoted as saying that ‘more than 280 companies have committed to providing more than 55,000 employment roles and it is now up the government to take steps to help create suitable training for individuals to fill the positions’ (Randstad 2011). This claim is disputed as constituting mainly ‘job pledges’ rather than actual jobs. In October 2010, Jordan and Mavec estimated that the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job placements under the scheme at around 2,800, clearly well short of the original goal. They noted that lack of hard evidence made it impossible to assess the efficiency of government spending and raised questions about accountability and transparency (Jordan & Mavec 2010). Given the conflicting claims and counter-claims, it is too early to make a definitive statement about the success or otherwise of the program.

4.5 School-to-work approaches and programs

Gelade and Fox (2008) have noted that the literature identifies VET in Schools programs – which engage local industries and a range of partnerships, whether across adult and community education (ACE) and VET, industry and VET, or schools and workplaces – as important in strengthening the success of pathways to employment in many regional localities.

In Western Australia, a number of programs are being developed (CME 2010):

- The CME Resourceful Schools Project involves resources companies and 48 schools across metropolitan, regional and remote WA. The objective is to broker opportunities that create the future workforce needed for the resources sector.

- Wesley College has developed an Aboriginal education program, which started in 2006, with student subsidies from mining companies.
- LaSalle College in Middle Swan is supported by BHP Billiton, which has provided scholarships, and by the Swan District Football Club through its Future Leaders grants. In 2009 students from the Pilbara attended the College for ‘personal development of each individual student and to provide transitional support through pathways into training, employment, and higher education and elite-level sport.

The 2011 Australian Government budget provided funds for a ranger cadet program to establish a school-to-work transition model in remote environmental services. This will help provide jobs in local land management initiatives (Garret & Arbib 2011).

Mining company Rio Tinto provides education programs, pre-employment training programs, scholarships and cadetship programs for individual and community development. These include:

- Gumala Mirnuwarni: program based in Karratha and Roebourne that provides intensive educational support and mentoring for Aboriginal secondary school students, delivered in partnership with government education departments and Woodside, through the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation.
- Work Experience Program: supports secondary school students interested in careers in the resources industry with a two-week school work experience program and school-based trainees who spend two days a week in the workplace as part of an ongoing program.

There are Aboriginal school programs for student success, such as ‘Polly Farmer’ and ‘Follow the Dream’, which bring innovative approaches to providing support in schools for disadvantaged Aboriginal students. The Western Australian Government has developed a Follow the Dream ‘aspirational strategy’, which is focused on helping Aboriginal students reach their career potential by graduating from high school and achieving university entrance. In 2010 the program was being delivered to more than 600 students in 10 metropolitan and 15 regional centres. The program is complementary to existing educational activities for Aboriginal students (Australian Government 2010).

The Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation (GPF) has established 19 after-school support programs or homework centres in regional and remote Western Australia (15), Northern Territory (2), Port Augusta in South Australia and Muswellbrook in NSW (Buckskin et al. 2010). The objective of these projects is to support Aboriginal secondary school students in the latter years of their secondary education. The aim is to increase their chances to continue into further education, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment.

It is difficult to assess the success of these programs at this relatively early stage. A GPF program in Port Augusta was evaluated in 2009 (Buckskin et al. 2010) and found to have positive benefits. Of the contributing factors to success, the most frequently mentioned in the interviews were the influence of the coordinator, the whole GPF model, the quality of tutors, the parent involvement and support, and the support from the secondary school principal and staff.

Edith Cowan University is conducting a longitudinal research study of the Follow the Dream / Partnerships for Success project (Galloway et al. 2009). The authors of the study reported that:

By the end of 2008, the strategy had demonstrated its worth: Aboriginal students were being retained to the end of Year 12, graduating from high school and entering further education, jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships. Even those

who did not complete Year 12 at an FTD/PFS site often had positive outcomes: continuing education on scholarships at independent schools and acceptance of employment opportunities including apprenticeships and other training options during their final years at high school (Partington et al. 2009, pp. 139–140).

Another approach for Aboriginal school students is provided by the Clontarf program. The Clontarf Foundation runs approximately 38 academies across Australia in partnership with secondary schools to improve the health, employment, education and life skills of Australia's teenage male Aboriginal population. It promotes sport (particularly AFL), activity and social interaction to make school more enjoyable (Clontarf 2011).

4.6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprenticeships

It appears that apprenticeship for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are few. Recently, some apprenticeships have been created in mining and in construction. Tiplady and Barclay (2007) noted that apprenticeships offer the best career development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people because once qualified the individuals entered the industry as skilled tradespersons, and currently in great demand.

Tiplady and Barclay (2007) note some other positive examples of corporate initiatives:

- Century Mine offers apprenticeships to local Aboriginal students who complete year 12.
- The Rio Tinto Cadetship Project offers financial support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to study for tertiary degrees. In 2007, there were 11 graduates, all gaining employment in their study area, with 6 employed at Rio Tinto.
- Pilbara Iron's Apprenticeship Program was established through the Gumala Mirnuwarni education project. The result was that of the 129 trade apprenticeship positions in Pilbara Iron, 22% (29 people) are filled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

5. Future remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways

5.1 Prospects for new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathways to employment

Success factors for creating pathways for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mining employment involve attention to issues of people, recruitment, management systems, retention and contractors. In the 'people' category, researchers identify a need for committed corporate leadership; willingness to provide extra employee support; and suitably qualified, skilled, informed and committed personnel in training and liaison positions (Tiplady & Barclay 2007).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment issues in the agrifood industries have been assessed recently, with some key failures being identified (ASA 2010). AgriFood Skills Australia (ASA) identified the following skills and training issues that contributed to the comparatively poor workplace participation rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the sector:

- failure to deliver training programs in a form that reflects cultural experience and values

- failure to deliver training in a form that overcomes disadvantage associated with deficiencies in literacy and numeracy
- absence of ongoing mentoring to overcome problems in the application of learning
- need to educate employers on ways to optimise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and retention rates.

ASA's report notes that the agrifood sector recognised the potential importance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour force, as it represented the fastest growing section of the Australian population with proportionately the largest number of young working age people (ASA 2010).

New research and development work on employment of remote Aboriginal people in rural food industries is proposed. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) saw opportunities for Aboriginal people in horticulture and agriculture. It proposes to investigate the following new research opportunities that would impact on employment of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in established and emerging primary industries (RIRDC 2010):

- feasibility of biofuel development in remote regions
- establishing pastoralists on 'new country'
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-owned meat processing in northern Australia
- aquaculture and fish farming
- broad-acre horticultural opportunities
- micro-business market gardens
- research expansion of food security projects for affordable, nutritious and reliable food supply, for example, Saudi Arabian desert self-sufficiency initiatives
- turning 'pests into profit' including camels, goats and donkeys
- sustainable wildlife harvesting and bush food production
- investment in the health and wellbeing sector (with linkages back to primary industries), for example, natural cosmetics
- agritourism businesses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'brand' for primary produce
- economic opportunities: scoping studies and resource assessments on both local and regional scales.

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH), is a program for improving and building new remote Aboriginal housing in the Northern Territory. The NPARIH program has a target of 20% Aboriginal employment. It also promotes subcontracting and use of local companies that can provide services at a competitive cost, placing a priority on the use of local Aboriginal companies (Northern Territory Government n.d.).

Past remote Aboriginal housing programs have delivered little sustained Aboriginal employment, although this poor record is not well documented in public information sources.² The forerunner to NPARIH, the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP), reported in 2010 that construction had commenced in 16 communities across the Northern Territory employing over 100 local Aboriginal people and achieving an Aboriginal employment rate of 34%, well exceeding its target of 20% (Australian

² This author has been involved, for a number of years, in the planning and delivery of remote Aboriginal housing programs in remote areas.

Government and Northern Territory Government 2010). At this stage, it is not clear how temporary this employment may be or have been. *Further information on the Aboriginal employment impacts of the program will need to be evaluated when it becomes available.*

In the similar East Kimberley Development Package, 18 houses were built in Wyndham and Kununurra in stage one. Stage two of construction saw 38 houses completed in Kununurra by July 2011. Further housing projects are planned, with an aim to increase skilled Aboriginal employment (Australian Government and Government of Western Australia 2011).

5.2 Developing future skills

Practices that have emerged in the Western Australian mining sector centre upon better community engagement (partnership model), mentoring of new employees, work readiness and school-to-work programs. They seem to work best where jobs are guaranteed for successful participants, rather than just providing training.

The school-to-work transition programs are among the best new 'good practice' approaches in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways. Hunter's (2010) examination of literature concludes that VET courses provided in secondary school appear to offer a viable pathway to local employment. Such courses also act to successfully retain students who otherwise may have left school before completing Year 12, and assist their transition from school to work.

Hunter (2010) also notes that the high levels of contact with the justice system is a further factor that is likely to disrupt the education and employment prospects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. This issue is being addressed in the Roebourne mining area of Western Australia. The consultancy company Value Edge is applying its innovative methodology, the Q Test: a language-free, culture-fair assessment tool. It is being used to assess the potential for work of young Aboriginal offenders with good but undeveloped potentials, on release from gaol. The aim is to place them in work (pers. comm. Darren Thomas, Value Edge Consulting, 12 May 2011).

In March 2011, the Australian Government accepted recommendations from a National Resources Sector Employment Taskforce established to help secure more than 70,000 additional skilled workers who would be needed for major resources projects over the next five years (DEEWR 2011). The taskforce recommended greater industry investment in workplace supervision and mentoring. Of interest for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment is the issue of employment continuity. The taskforce recommended that the government facilitate movement of workers between the construction industry and the resources industry.

A final example is that financial industry corporations such as National Australia Bank have developed career paths for small numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees, but these strategies do not appear to be devolving into remote regions at this stage (NAB 2011).

5.3 Wellbeing

Research indicates the importance of health, nutrition and the social determinants of health for affecting future capacity to engage in pathways to employment (CSDH 2008). There is little research available on the dynamics of these issues. New research being undertaken by the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP 2012a) will develop an evidence base on the interplay between these factors.

The need for a holistic approach is developing some resonance among industry participants. The Chamber for Minerals and Energy reports that in Western Australia (CME 2010, p. 18):

Newcrest and Martu Consultative Committee have found it is the interrelationship between health, education and training, employment and community relations that results in local Aboriginal people becoming committed to the mine-related work, being job-ready, retained in the industry and fully involved in community and industry development over the long term.

The Aboriginal mining and roads servicing company Myuma has a holistic focus on its workers' wellbeing. Its practice links enterprise development, employment, training, cultural heritage and service delivery for Aboriginal people (Memmott 2010, p. 5). It creates Aboriginal employment and ensures personal health and wellbeing of the group's Aboriginal workers. Myuma trains and employs thirty people annually. It provides a cultural living space: the Dugalunji 'Work Camp' under the leadership of the Aboriginal Managing Director. Its vision extends in the direction of the needs of the industry partners for whom it provides services, as well as to the personal and professional needs of its workers.

5.4 Measures of employment

The history of the CDEP program shows how decent (fair and equitable) employment standards can be undermined: ABS calculated unemployment in communities by including CDEP participants as 'employed'; this practice resulted in an apparent unemployment rate of, for example, 40% instead of a rate of 90%. This meant that the lack of job-creating economic development was able to be statistically masked for a long time, and a significant spread of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways were not fully developed.

Despite the history of remote underdevelopment, government and business initiatives have recently made positive pro-employment impacts. There has been an expansion of activities designed to create and improve employment pathways for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Preparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work in industries is a challenge for remote business and public organisations. Employment outcomes are reduced by low educational attainment, and low labour force participation. Education is one factor in the work-readiness equation. Health status and cultural fit also have an impact, as does the proximity of work opportunities.

Fitting people to jobs and jobs to people is a core activity of employment pathway projects. Lack of clear measures may open questions about the benefits of some community wellbeing projects. Outcomes of projects may prove difficult to measure 'objectively', at least in the short term. Subjective measures also need development. *Research is required to develop this analysis, as advocated by Dierksmeier (2010, p. 10), who suggests that we need 'to find more and better qualitative definitions of corporate and economic success'.*

5.5 Job guarantees

A key suggestion of some industry observers is that work-readiness training works best when people are already employed and have jobs into which they can move. Examples of this approach are growing.

At an individual corporate level, CITIC Pacific Mining completed a Work Ready Program with Roebourne TAFE in 2009–2010. All participants were guaranteed permanent employment if they completed the training. Three of the five gained full-time work in fencing and weed spraying, a fourth was employed as a

ranger and a fifth commenced an apprenticeship in fabrication. An Aboriginal mentor assisted the program participants (CME 2010).

Fortescue Metals' Group Vocation and Training Centre operates a program which has been developed to avoid the mistakes of previously unsuccessful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment initiatives. The program involves community engagement, a guaranteed job, recruitment and job matching, training and support. Personal support is provided by support workers (Tiplady & Barclay 2007).

At a government policy level, job guarantee schemes are being proposed as government strategies to reduce long-term unemployment. This was proposed by the Demos Foundation in Britain (DEMOS 2009), in Iran (Karimi 2008), India (Jha et al. 2010), and the United States (Auerbach 2010). In Australia, Quirk (2009) argues for a return to public sector employment of trainees and apprentices, as occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. This would deal with issues of skill formation and unemployment simultaneously.

6. Human capital issues and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment

New research is needed that develops appropriate 'complexity frameworks' that more accurately reflect complex social and economic problems. Applied to the 'wicked problems' of remote disadvantage, this can provide an antidote to simplistic, linear logic, piecemeal 'solutions' of policy and program dilemmas.

Key factors that influence the aims, ambitions and processes of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment projects are analysed below. Over the medium term, outcomes are likely to be significantly affected by perceptions about these influencing factors.

Within a 'complexity' framework methodology, the 'what works/doesn't work' question can be understood as itself containing significant complexities. Positive new directions in employment solutions may depend upon systemic changes as well as the creation of niche programs, with implications for future research.

6.1 Strategic obstacles to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment

Literature suggests that interventions to create pathways for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment must contend with significant obstacles. Key obstacles that have been identified are:

- Lack of literacy, numeracy, and general problem-solving skills resulting from poor participation in the school system, and perhaps the poor quality of the education experience delivered through remote schooling systems. No further analysis of this issue is provided in the current paper. The issue is now widely recognised as an obstacle, and is the subject of a CRC-REP research program on improving remote Aboriginal education (CRC-REP 2012b).
- 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture' is perceived by some analysts as being, in some senses, alien to modern work practices. Some commentators view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as validating perceived 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander choices' by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who are believed to prefer non-full-time employment livelihoods rather than jobs. This 'preference' complicates the landscape of work possibilities and employment pathways.
- The existence of a 'welfare culture'. It has been postulated that this culture may be inimical to the acquisition of a 'work' culture.

- Government policy changes affecting remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. Recent changes are having both positive and negative effects at a local level.

6.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and employment

Assumptions that emphasise the effects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture may also affect the observer's perceptions of what is possible to achieve. Assumptions may determine what is meant by 'success'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture may be perceived as limiting the possibility of commitment to full-time work, and therefore reducing the priority of training for it. *It can be argued that such perceptions (views, values, truths?) about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture may require redefining the nature of 'success' as it is applied to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment programs. Further research is required to illuminate these issues.*

Wallace and Boyle (2010, p. 2) suggest that 'a lack of culturally appropriate learning approaches, and learning resources' reduce 'successful outcomes' for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander VET students. This may be true, and is deserving of future research attention. Conceivably, views about culture could themselves become key factors in determining definitions and possibilities of success.

The 'observer' and their assumptions may affect results of employment pathway experiences. Assumptions may need to be modified if supporting evidence is insufficiently convincing. Assumptions about culture will need close examination in future research. Some commentators, critical of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and others in praise of it, suggest that it creates a different kind of person from one who desires to participate willingly in 'mainstream work'. Such views lead easily into a discourse that characterises traditional culture and modern work-based culture as incompatible.

There are references in the literature to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture being incompatible with work habits that accompany economic development. The author's perspective on this issue is that such views lack convincing research evidence to support them. However, the notion persists of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'preference' for ways of life that are not consistent with 'mainstream' work. Project reports suggest that training objectives sometimes reduce the importance of employment, in favour of such things as 'cultural preferences'. Rea et al. (2008, p. 10) for example, suggest that:

Training opportunities for Aboriginal people ... are underpinned by policies that aim for greater Aboriginal participation and employment, economic independence and opportunity. Yet, some Aboriginal people have goals that differ from the economic motives and 'mainstream' jobs held by non-Aboriginal Australians.

Similar views are presented by researchers (McRae-Williams & Gerritsen 2010) who argue that 'culture ... is an important, almost sufficient, barrier to Indigenous integration to some non-Indigenous mores and social requirements, such as working for a living'. The authors also say – of the Aboriginal community that provides the cultural template for their observations – that '[its] development included no modern economic base and the settlement has subsequently not acquired one'.

Evidence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander non-preference for 'mainstream' jobs should be carefully assessed in the context of a lack of regional job opportunities. *Further research is needed to assess individual and community preferences, including 'cultural' ones, and their implications for the future.*

The question of whether 'goals that differ' from 'the economic motives of non-Aboriginal Australians' are widespread, is worthy of further research. In contrast with the view represented in the employment

literature above, Taylor (2010) sees employment goal convergence. In answer to the question ‘Education for What?’ he suggests the Council of Australian Governments’ objectives for public education are that:

Beyond schooling, the aim is to provide all working-aged Australians with the opportunity to develop skills and qualifications needed to enable them to be effective participants in, and contributors to, the modern labour market. To achieve this, individuals are to be assisted to overcome barriers in education, training and employment and to be motivated to acquire and utilise new skills.

Taylor (2010, p. 6) goes on to make the point that ‘to the extent that recognised Thamarrurr leaders [from Wadeye in the NT] represent such views, the aims of education as articulated by government would appear to be not incompatible’.

Mining company Rio Tinto goes further, saying ‘we have to put people into real mainstream jobs; not confine Aboriginal people to particular jobs. Without a real job to go to, there is no point in training people’ (Rio Tinto 2009, p. 21). There are clearly differing views about these issues, requiring further research.

The relation between culture and economic development is a long-standing issue. Indigenous, ethnic, national and local cultures have variously been declared at odds with the objective of economic development. Typically, ‘culturalist’ arguments suggest that there is some incompatibility between certain traditional cultural habits or ‘world views’ and the project of developing modern economic structures and relations.

These arguments are closely analysed by Chang in his book chapter *Lazy Japanese and thieving Germans: Are some cultures incapable of economic development?* Chang summarises:

The view that cultural differences explain the variations in economic development across societies has been around for a long time. The underlying insight is obvious. Different cultures produce people with different values, which manifest themselves in different behaviour ... But the point is that people’s behaviour is not determined by culture. Moreover, cultures change; so it is wrong to treat culture as destiny, as many culturalists are wont to do.

(Chang 2007, pp. 185 & 194)

Chang documents various ways in which cultural traits and values are seen at certain times as anti-economic development, and at other times (looking back) the same things are often seen as pro-development factors:

The same cultural element can be interpreted as having positive or negative implications, depending on the result you seek. The best example is loyalty ... some people think that the emphasis on loyalty is what makes the Japanese variety of Confucianism more suited to economic development than other varieties. Other people judge the emphasis on loyalty to be exactly what is wrong with Confucianism, since it stifles independent thinking and thus innovation.

(Chang 2007, pp. 191–192).

Chang focuses on laziness, saying that:

It is true that there are a lot more people ‘lazing around’ in poor countries. But is it because they culturally prefer lounging about to working hard? Usually not. It is

mainly because poor countries have a lot of people who are unemployed or underemployed ... this is the result of economic conditions rather than culture.

(Chang 2007, p. 195)

His main point is that ‘culture changes with economic development’; his subsidiary point is that ‘culture, with economic stagnation, can also change for the worse’. It is arguable that this is precisely what has happened in a number of remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. From this point of view, it is a lack of economic development that leads to cultural malaise, and to the associated consequences of deteriorating social determinants of health and wellbeing.

Based on research and his experience in Korea, Chang (2007) emphasises three things required to establish behavioural traits that are compatible with economic development:

- ideological exhortation – this means taking a position in favour of the value of economic development
- policy measures to promote economic development
- institutional changes that foster the desired cultural changes.

He concludes that:

Though culture and economic development influence each other, the causality is far stronger from the latter to the former. Economic development to a large extent creates a culture that it needs. Changes in economic structure change the way people live and interact with one another, which, in turn, changes the way they understand the world and behave ... many of the behavioural changes that are supposed to ‘explain’ economic development (e.g. hard work, time-keeping, frugality), are actually its consequences, rather than its causes.

(Chang 2007, pp. 200–201)

In Australia, there is a dearth of balanced research on the issues of culture and development. Employment pathway plans, currently difficult to develop, may be easier to successfully implement if diversified economic development momentum is created. Plans to diversify economic structures could include real job guarantees for remote people who enter into employment training.

6.1.2 Welfare culture

Some research focuses on a ‘welfare culture’ as an obstacle to participation in employment pathway activities. This view is not necessarily accurate. Research into youth in areas of high family unemployment questions the welfare culture thesis. Attention has been focused on ‘passive welfare’, as though this is a cause of lack of development, dysfunction and disadvantage. The ‘passive welfare’ thesis suggests that existence of social welfare benefits causes ‘passivity’ (often a euphemism for unwillingness to work). For this assertion to be valid, opportunity for employment would need to be achievable for the individuals concerned.

In remote circumstances ‘social welfare’ can also be described as ‘opportunity- less welfare’. The ‘passivity’ observed by commentators is, arguably, more attributable to the absence of viable employment opportunities than to the presence of welfare. People become habituated to a non-work existence.

Researchers on youth attitudes to work and welfare have described:

... concerns that the welfare system itself may produce a culture of dependence ... that growing up in families or in neighbourhoods heavily reliant on social

assistance alters children's preferences by weakening their work ethic ... we remain a long way from establishing that the sufficient conditions for a welfare culture exist.

(Baron et al. 2008, pp. 2 & 24)

It is arguable that, rather than a welfare culture, the determining reality of daily life in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is a welfare economy. The largest community in the Northern Territory, at Wadeye, Taylor says:

... was established for the purposes of welfare administration and evangelism. It had no modern economic base ... and it has produced an economy that is dominated by transfer payments from government.

(Taylor 2010, p. 32)

A welfare economy creates rules that make it difficult for individuals and communities to exercise the choices involved in facilitating economic development. The welfare economy militates against people acquiring habits that are necessary for economic work cultures. It entrenches poverty (Martin 2011). It creates 'opportunity-less welfare'.

6.1.3 Government policy changes

While the intention of COAG government policy appears to be to encourage economic development in remote community contexts, the operational context for this is far from clear. The notion of moving people from welfare dependence to employment effectively assumes economic activity which may not yet exist in a range of rural and remote places.

Recent government intentions have been to phase down the CDEP program and move participants into job search. The credibility of this strategy relies on the occurrence of sufficient job creation occurring to enable real work choices. Taylor (2010) emphasises 'the importance of shifts in government policy and program delivery on economic indicators'. He says that:

... the other likely impact of these changes is that the unemployment rate will rise substantially. In May 2009, the unemployment rate at Wadeye calculated as a proportion of the labour force was 43.8 per cent. This compared to a national rate of 5.7 per cent. If all current CDEP participants were to transfer immediately to an employment service provider the rate at Wadeye could be as high as 74 per cent. Thus, in order to avoid a worsening of labour force indicators at Wadeye, much is going to depend on the ability of providers to develop successful employment pathways.

(Taylor 2010, p. 35)

6.2 Individuals and community cultures

Individual and community contexts are a necessary part of future research analysis for participatory strategies to improve population wellbeing. The 'family' exists in between individual and community modes of being, often linking both. Pathways to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in remote Australia are embedded in this larger reality. They contribute as determinants of wellbeing, and the overall state of wellbeing contributes to better pathway experiences.

More research on the social factors contributing to successful, sustainable employment outcomes is required for good policy. Similarly the contribution of employment to community and individual wellbeing, under-researched in Australia, is an important area for further research. This will help to avoid the dangers of ‘segmentalism’. Dierksmeier argues that:

Owing to the holistic nature of various socioeconomic phenomena, any overly segmented analysis is bound to keep out truly causal factors and thus to ascribe causality to what are, actually, irrelevant, albeit contiguous phenomena.

(Dierksmeier 2011 p. 270)

Circumstances and capabilities often change over an individual’s life stages. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathways, their supports and their results, need to be adapted to these changes. Sundmacher et al. (2011) say that ‘the life-course approach suggests that different explanatory factors have different impacts at different points over the life-course’.

Complicating the issues is that fact that:

The measurement of individual welfare levels is central to the assessment of distributive justice and the design and evaluation of redistributive social policies ... Measures of individual welfare levels are the basic input to all inequality, poverty or mobility analyses.

(Kuklys 2005, p. 1)

The main types of employment in modern Australia, and pathways to them, are geared to individual capabilities. Australian employment structures have evolved under conditions of modern capitalism, which has weakened the organic bonds of traditional communities. Modern industries require that individuals learn to adapt to employment conditions established within competitive industry labour markets.

Jobs are designed according to perceived industrial needs. Baseline measures of productivity or profitability define the boundaries of modern industry. Its institutional and legal framework for economic activity shifts decision choices away from the context and options of traditional community life. In remote Aboriginal contexts, communities may need to absorb the implications of modern industrial work cultures, if they are to achieve local economic development and economic sustainability.

6.3 Measuring quality of employment and pathways

Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment pathway experiences ought to reflect standards of quality such as you might expect to find in the ‘good’ jobs of our society. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Task Force on the Measurement of Quality of Employment reported in 2010 on a proposed standard set of measures (indicators). It presented a conceptual paper and a set of indicators for statistical measurement of quality of employment (UNECE 2010).

This report represents a state-of-the-art approach to examining the quality of employment. It applies a set of statistical indicators to measure the quality of employment in a number of countries. *Application of a similar set of indicators to remote employment processes may provide a quality framework for improvement in Aboriginal employment pathway evaluation and planning.* UNECE says that ‘further work would be required to provide the specifics of each indicator (UNECE 2010, p. 8).

UNECE analysis of quality of employment is built upon indicators developed around seven themes, or dimensions (UNECE 2010, pp.12–14). These are:

1. safety and ethics of employment
2. income and benefits from employment
3. working hours and balancing work and non-working life
4. security of employment and social protection
5. social dialogue
6. skills development and training
7. work motivation.

Policy makers and planners working on employment issues and pathways would do well to think about how to apply a 'quality of work framework' to working issues. Such considerations can make a significant difference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's future access to 'decent work'.

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