

## Remote Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure: Factors affecting successful regional governance

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### Abstract

The provision of sufficient and sustainable remote indigenous housing and infrastructure in remote areas is still a major challenge for service providers. Attempts to meet this need have led to the development of a wide range of housing and housing-related programs in remote indigenous communities. There is a move from an external program-driven approach for housing, to a focus on sustainable local and regional systems of governance in indigenous communities to support the delivery and recurrent maintenance of housing and infrastructure. This paper reports on research into best practice case studies in remote area indigenous housing in WA and the NT. It includes community members' perceptions of current programs as well as their suggestions for improvements. The lessons from the case studies provide direction for the development of strategies to support sustainable local and regional governance that, in turn, supports the development and maintenance of appropriate remote area indigenous housing. The challenges for sustainable regional governance in remote indigenous communities include the lack of economic development opportunities, the skills of local community members and the willingness and capacities of external service providers to take a community development approach.

## 1. Introduction

This research is being conducted by the Remote Area Developments Group (RADG) for the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The need for increased research into indigenous housing was highlighted in the seminal document produced by the COAG Housing Ministers Conference in May 2001 entitled "Building a Better Future: Indigenous Housing to 2010". This document identified the need for a "national Indigenous housing research program" to "identify and address (the) unmet housing needs of Indigenous people"(FaCS 2002).

This research, undertaken during 2002/03, complements current and emerging Commonwealth, Western Australian (WA) and Northern Territory (NT) policy regarding indigenous governance capacity-building and service-delivery co-ordination to improve housing management and maintenance. The case studies are remote indigenous communities and indigenous community housing organisations in both WA and NT. This paper reviews the progress of the research and provides some preliminary findings. The first section of this paper outlines the relevance of the research, the research questions and the methodology being used. The second section explains the progress of the research since commencing in 2002. The third section outlines the "Central Remote Model", an innovative housing delivery and governance program in the Northern Territory as well as some preliminary findings. A Positioning Paper, produced earlier in the research process in 2002, provides background information and is available on the AHURI website [www.ahuri.edu.au](http://www.ahuri.edu.au). For the most recent fieldwork conducted in 2003 the data gathered is still being analysed, thus the conclusions here are preliminary and incomplete. Final conclusions will be provided

in future outputs, including the Final Report and a Research and Policy Bulletin. Further policy focus groups and community fieldwork will involve on-going dissemination of findings.

It has long been recognised that the housing of Indigenous Australians is of a considerably lower standard than that enjoyed by other Australians and that they endure much higher rates of homelessness (Government of Western Australia 2002). This state of affairs can partly be traced to the 1967 Federal referendum that reworded legislation enabling the Commonwealth Government to legislate for Aboriginal people. The referendum did not, however, remove the existing State and Territory responsibility. This has resulted in the current shared responsibility for indigenous housing policy formulation and funding between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. This arrangement has been hampered by tension between the Commonwealth and State/Territories as to who should have the primary responsibility for Aboriginal people. The result was to entrench the historical inequalities in housing through a poorly coordinated range of policies and programs at Commonwealth and State/Territory level.

## **2. Methodology**

The two questions that guided the research are:

- i. How can human service program integration in relation to housing assistance be improved to achieve a whole of government approach?
- ii. What are the perceived and actual differences in the nature of community control, ownership and management of housing and how these contribute to asset management in remote indigenous communities?

A literature review began at the inception of the project. It focussed on Indigenous housing and governance history, policies, programs and key national policy developments that give direction to policy. Due to the rapidly changing nature of housing policy, particularly in Western Australia, the literature review became an ongoing process, essential to an understanding of the context of the project.

A User Group was established, concurrently with the literature review mentioned above, to guide the project through all the necessary tasks and to ensure that the research is relevant to policy. The User Group, in most cases, also ensured access to up-to-date information sources. User Group meetings have been held in Perth and Darwin and regular contact maintained throughout the project. Members of the User Group include:

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission;
- The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (Darwin Office);
- The WA Department of Housing and Works (Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Unit);
- The WA Department of Indigenous Affairs;
- The WA Department of the Premier and Cabinet;
- NT Dept of Community Development, Sports & Cultural Affairs – Indigenous Housing & Essential Services Unit (IHANT secretariat)

The selection of the final case studies was determined by three factors: first, input from the User Group, second, the personal contacts of the research team with the community and regional organisation members and third, the cost and logistics involved in visiting the communities. It was decided that selection should include two communities, two regional (umbrella) organisations, two ATSIC Regional Councils with IHANT and AHIC to provide context for the field study. The case studies were also selected to represent cases of best practice asset management. A fairly lengthy process preceded the selection of the final case studies. Secondary information was collected on a short-list of possible case studies and these were further refined. The case studies that were selected are shown in Table 1:

**Table 1: Case Studies Finally Agreed Upon**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Western Australia</b>	<b>Northern Territory</b>
<b>State/Territory Housing Provider</b>	AHID (within Department of Housing & Works)	IHANT (within Department of Community Development, Sport & Cultural Affairs)
<b>Regional Council</b>	Kullarri Regional Council	Central Remote Regional Council
<b>Regional Organisation</b>	Mamabulanjin Aboriginal Corporation	Tangentyere Council
<b>Community</b>	Lombadina	Papunya
<b>Community</b>	Djarindjin	Laramba
<b>Regional Agreement</b>	Tjurubalan Comprehensive Regional Agreement (The COAG WA Site Project)	West MacDonnells model (Wangka Willurara Regional Agreement)

Secondary data was collected on a far wider range of potential case studies than those reflected in the table above. In addition, a range of telephone interviews were conducted with key people in the potential case studies. This information was collated into profiles for each potential case study community. These profiles consist of information relevant for fieldwork including details of the Community Organisation/s, Chairperson, Councillors, Staff and details of relevant agencies. The profiles contain contact information, information on the location of the community as well as housing-related programs. The Community Profiles were an invaluable fieldwork tool and were continually updated as new information emerged. In their draft form they were sent to each of the case studies for confirmation and approval of the details contained therein.

To answer the research questions, a multi-level approach was adopted. This can best be explained as shown in Table 2:

**Table 2: Levels of Research**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Information gathered</b>	<b>Research Methods</b>
<b>Commonwealth (FACS, OATSIS, excluding ATSI/ATSIS)</b>	Policy and Programs	Literature Review, Telephone Interviews
<b>State/Territory (including ATSI/ATSIS State Offices)</b>	Policy, Programs and their implementation	Literature Review, Telephone Interviews, Interviews, Meetings and email correspondence
<b>Regional Council</b>	Policy, Programs and their implementation	Literature Review, Telephone Interviews, Interviews and Meetings
<b>Regional Service Providers</b>	Programs, their implementation and perceptions	Literature Review, Telephone Interviews, Interviews, Meetings and email correspondence
<b>Community Council/Committee</b>	Program Implementation and Perceptions	Telephone Interviews, Interviews, Meetings
<b>Community Housing Management Staff</b>	Program Implementation and Perceptions	Telephone Interviews, Interviews, Meetings

It was originally intended to workshop the issues of program integration and community housing management with community members. The rationale of this approach is that the programs should show an improvement in community members' housing. In addition, community members would be best placed to comment on community housing management and related issues. Despite the research teams best efforts there was no interest in contributing to the project. The aims of the research are not sufficiently tangible for community members to perceive them as having benefit for them.

Four fieldwork trips were undertaken:

- October 2002: Broome (ATSIC, Mamabulanjin Aboriginal Corporation), Lombadina, Djarindjin, Wiramanu (Balgo);
- November 2002: Alice Springs (ATSIC, DCDSKA, IHANT, Tangentyere Council Ngaanyatjarra Council Head Office), Laramba, Papunya,;
- May 2003: Broome (ATSIC, Mamabulanjin), Lombadina, Djarindjin;
- June/July 2003: Alice Springs (ATSIC, DCDSKA, IHANT Tangentyere), Laramba, Papunya.

Social Assessment of the case studies is the primary method used to answer the research questions. Social Assessment draws from the applied social sciences, particularly applied anthropology (Taylor, Bryan et al. 1995). The difference between Social Assessment and other forms of social research is that it is inductive rather than deductive and is issues-orientated. This makes the method particularly useful where an investigative approach is required. Another aspect of the method is that it is not linear but iterative and cumulative.

Key Issues guide the fieldwork so that the research is focused and relevant to the research topic. Prior to fieldwork, the key issues relating to housing program integration and community governance were identified based on the secondary data analysis and telephone interviews. As mentioned above, this is an iterative process and the Key Issues in the study can change or develop as the study progresses and, in this case events produce issues which affect the research and therefore need to be investigated.

The General Key Issues which were identified for both Western Australia and the Northern Territory are:

- The Program Integration Mechanisms, both current and emerging, such as the Housing Bilateral Agreements, the Comprehensive Regional Agreements and as well as the Central Remote (Papunya) Model and perceptions of these mechanisms;
- Housing Management at program, project and community level and;
- Capacity-Building/Empowerment.

An additional Key Issue for Western Australia is: 'The Implementation of the Housing Bilateral Agreement'. An additional Key Issue for the Northern Territory is: 'The Implementation of the Papunya/Central Remote Model'.

Social Assessments do not routinely deal with as institutionally complex a program environment as presented by this project. The team therefore developed an additional tool to understand and analyse the institutional environment which we have called "Institutional Mapping".

The need for a tool to portray the complex layers of organisations and programs emerged prior to the first round of fieldwork. The research team found that a schematic portrayal of the different organisations and programs assisted them to understand the relationships between agencies and programs. The research team drew up organisational maps to represent their understanding of the interrelationships and workshopped these during the first round of fieldwork. Feedback was obtained from different sources and the institutional maps continually updated during fieldwork to capture inputs. Early in the fieldwork, the team realised that two types of institutional maps were needed:

- an organisational chart which illustrates the formal relationship between agencies and programs; and
- a process map which illustrates the flow of funding and information between organisations.

These institutional maps provided a useful tool and were workshopped at meetings. Many people commented that they had never before understood how different organisations

related to each other. Individuals who understood the overall institutional structure of Western Australia and the Northern Territory were few and far between.

The main form of data analysis involves correlating the field data with the key issues. In the final research report, each of the Key Issues mentioned above will be discussed with reference to case studies and supported by institutional maps.

This paper does not permit a discussion of the findings related to all the Key Issues. The next section discusses an innovative regional indigenous housing model that provides lessons in regional sustainability. The paper will conclude with some of the general preliminary findings of the research in relation to both the Research Questions.

### 3 The Central Remote Model

The Central Remote Model (formerly called the Papunya Model) provides an excellent example of sustainable regional governance, service delivery and employment creation. It was developed by the Central Remote Regional Council (CRRC), in association with ATSIC and IHANT (the Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory, in response to:

- a concern among community elders about the lack of employment opportunities for the young people in their communities;
- the lack of housing-related skills in remote communities for construction and maintenance; and,
- the increasing costs associated with the prevailing community by community approach to the provision of housing under IHANT's Construction Program (IHANT 2002; Robinya 2002; Whitehead 2002; Anderson and Robinya 2003).

The CRRC decided to make a number of changes to improve housing outcomes for the people in their region. The three main changes include: first, standardise a number of housing plans for the whole region which introduces economies of scale; second, have one project manager for a number of projects; and third, to introduce a training and employment strategy for the region (Anderson 2001; IHANT 2002; Whitehead 2002; Anderson and Robinya 2003).

As a pilot project, the Central Remote/Papunya Model has four key objectives:

- To coordinate construction at the sites;
- To evaluate if a regional contract represents cost saving over several smaller contracts;
- To determine if standardised housing designs are more efficient; and,
- To determine if project continuity can sustain local Indigenous building and maintenance teams (IHANT 2002)

The CRRC's vision included the establishment of construction teams in the communities, the building of local capacity, economies of scale and creating opportunities for local people. A key aspect of the model's success and likely sustainability is that the process has been largely controlled by indigenous people from the outset. It was initiated and developed by the CRRC, with assistance from ATSIC and IHANT, and implemented largely in partnership with Tangentyere Aboriginal Corporation. William Tilmouth, the Executive Director of Tangentyere commented that the model was initiated with a movement down from the CRRC, another up from Tangentyere and they met in the middle (Tilmouth 2003).

The implementation of this vision necessitated an innovative and pro-active approach from all the partners in the pilot project. These include:

- The **Central Remote Regional Council** who hold the copyright over the model and steer the process (Robinya 2002).

- The **Communities** - the model is currently being implemented in 7 communities within the CRRC's Region. In addition, the communities who agreed to participate in the pilot project selected potential apprentices/trainees to be trained in the three-year Certificate 3 level in the Certificate for General Construction. The communities employ the trainees and also pay for their accommodation when they attend 'block release' training in Alice Springs (Laughton 2003; Loades 2003).
- The funding bodies (**IHANT** and **DCDSCA**) who enabled the pilot program by negotiating multi-year funding, including two training houses per year per participating community. DCDSCA are also the IHANT Program Manager and have played an important role in developing the Training and Employment Project (Rivers 2002; Anderson and Robinya 2003; Loades 2003).
- **Tangentyere Job Shop** – the Training Partner and the employer of the mostly indigenous Builder-Trainers. Each community has a resident Builder-Trainer to provide hands-on training for the trainees and together they form the community building team. Tangentyere Job Shop is responsible for ensuring that the trainees or apprentices receive the appropriate training and provides a mentoring role for the Builder-Trainer and his apprentices.
- **Tangentyere Construction** – the Construction Project Manager who are responsible for ensuring that the construction meets both the Australian Building Standards and the Environmental Health Standards (Anderson and Robinya 2003; Laughton 2003).
- **DEWR** - the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations who provide funding through the Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP) which tops-up apprentice salaries and provides a tool and clothing allowance (Anderson and Robinya 2003).
- **DEET** - Northern Territory Department of Education and Training who fund additional literacy and numeracy training (Anderson and Robinya 2003).
- **Centralian College** - the Registered Training Authority which provides on and off the job training (Anderson and Robinya 2003).

Although the implementation of the pilot project to date has not been without problems, its successes have far outweighed the difficulties. A number of factors have influenced its success:

- The strong indigenous leadership from primarily the CRRC and Tangentyere Aboriginal Corporation;
- A strong indigenous focus – the project was developed by an indigenous organisation, managed by an indigenous organisation and the training is provided mostly by indigenous builder-trainers (Laughton 2003);
- Involvement of the communities in, for example, the selection of the trainees/apprentices and a sharing of responsibility for the costs;
- A problem-solving approach among the partners above and a desire to 'make it work';
- An enabling approach from government departments and agencies;
- The adopting of a 'community development' approach;
- The project pays the trainees the same as 'mainstream' apprentices (Laughton 2003);
- The project responds to the need in the communities for employment creation, the local development of skills, the need for local repair and maintenance skills and a need for local employment for the young adults.

One of the most telling examples of the pilot program's success was during a visit to the Papunya Community near Alice Springs. The Town Clerk told of frequent vandalism of houses that are under construction by 'mainstream' contractors. No vandalism occurred to the training houses either during construction or when unoccupied for a while awaiting the final building inspection (Hanley 2003). Both case study communities that form part of the pilot program reported being very proud of their apprentices and the houses they have built.

## 4 Preliminary Findings

The following section presents very brief preliminary research findings, particularly as they relate to regional governance. The research findings are presented in relation to each research question.

### ***Research question 1: How would human service program integration in relation to housing assistance best be improved to achieve a whole of government approach?***

- Rationalisation and integration of Indigenous housing programs is occurring in Western Australia and the Northern Territory under the Bilateral agreements. Although this is a step in the right direction, the range of indigenous housing and housing-related programs is complex and difficult to understand. There appears to be some diffusion of responsibility and a streamlined simplified housing delivery system that adopts a community development approach is likely to be more efficient and effective
- The Northern Territory's Central Remote Model, as discussed in the section above, appears to be a good case of housing and housing management development at a regional level.

### ***Research question 2: What are the perceived and 'actual' differences in the nature of community control, ownership and management of housing and how these contribute to asset management in remote indigenous communities?***

- The leadership capacity of individuals in indigenous communities is an important trait that contributes to successful community development.
- Regional Program Management - Housing program management for remote areas is mostly managed on a State-Territory – wide basis with concomitant difficulties in communication. All the case study communities expressed dissatisfaction with this arrangement and preferred program management at a regional level. In addition, communities who have management capacity preferred community level project management and all expressed need to be consulted on developments in their communities.
- Standardisation of housing designs, construction materials, fixtures and fittings within an area can be effective in improving community-based management and maintenance of housing stock.
- There is at times a lack of an enabling environment for communities to progress further both in the case of communities in desperate need of additional services and in the case of those that are relatively well-developed and seek further development.
- Community as Client - program and project management should be performed with the mindset of the community management rather than the government agency as the client.
- Administrative Overload for Community Councils - Limit the administrative reporting and meetings required of Community Councils to that which is absolutely essential.
- Barriers to the effective participation and empowerment of communities in housing should be removed by allowing a greater degree of flexibility in policy implementation.
- There is a need for housing-related skills in remote communities for housing construction, maintenance and repairs. At the same time, there is a need for employment opportunities. The projects piloting the Central Remote Model illustrate how these needs can be satisfied simultaneously.

As mentioned above, these research findings are preliminary and incomplete. The full research findings will be available in the final report which will be available on the AHURI website [www.ahuri.edu.au](http://www.ahuri.edu.au) when complete.

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