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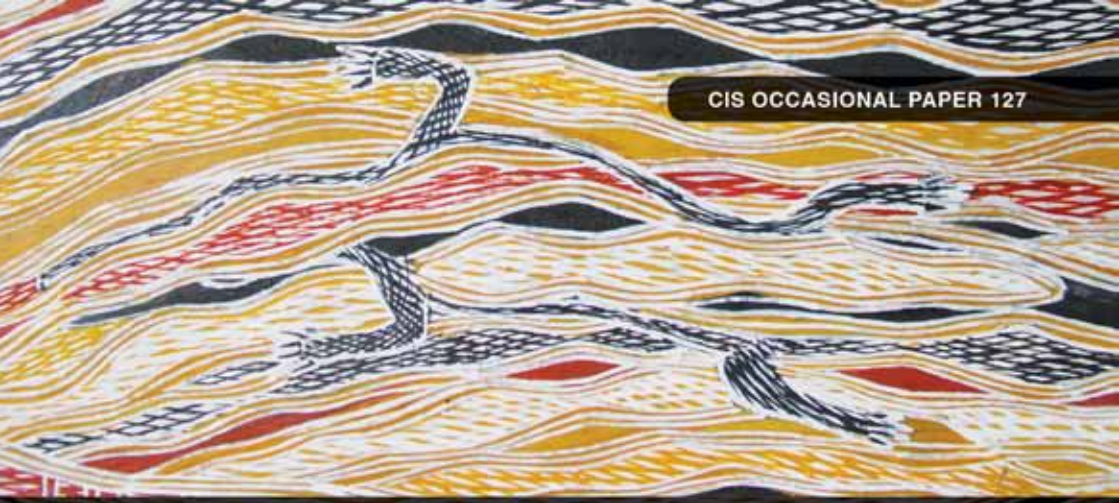
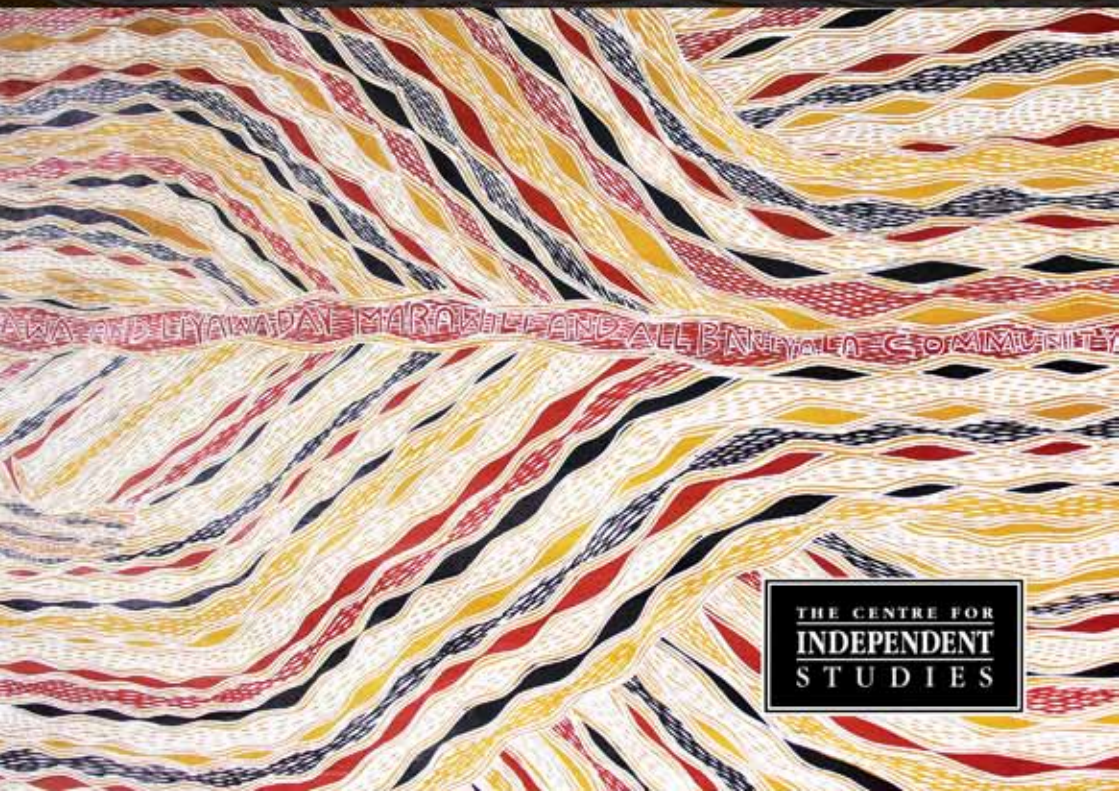


Sustainability of Indigenous Communities

Wesley Aird and Ron Staples



THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES

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Wesley Aird and Ron Staples

Foreword by Sara Hudson

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Foreword*

Sara Hudson
Research Fellow, The Centre for Independent Studies

Wesley Aird and Ron Staples raise three important points in this paper about development in remote Indigenous communities: the importance of community participation, change agents (people living in the community who act as facilitators for improvement), and the need for the change agents to have technical developmental expertise and practical knowledge. These are not mere abstract concepts in development theory but real tangible tools that remote communities can use to create better outcomes.

The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) and Sydney Rotarians, notably a 'Team' led by Andy Buttfield, have been putting these and other points outlined in this paper into practice to help improve the lives of the residents in a small East Arnhem Aboriginal community called Baniyala, or Yilpara. Located 210 kilometres from the mining town of Nhulunbuy, Baniyala has approximately 160 Yolgnu-speaking residents. The CIS experience in Baniyala proves if you have people with practical skills working with (not for) a community, you can make a real difference. Right from the start, Buttfield said he would not work with the community unless they nominated people to help him.

The CIS became involved with Baniyala by chance in 2004. A nurse, Jenness Warin, working in Baniyala as an adult educator happened to hear CIS Senior Fellow Helen Hughes on the radio

* Parts of this foreword are drawn from an unpublished report by Helen Huges, 'Education in Baniyala/Yilpara: One Indigenous Community's Experience of Government 2003–08.'

discussing problems in the Pacific, and felt that the same problems—dilapidated housing, poor health, and widespread illiteracy and unemployment—were present in remote Indigenous communities in Australia.

When Warin visited Sydney with her best student, Kathy Marawili, to receive the Commonwealth education minister's excellence award for 'outstanding contributions to improving literacy and numeracy,' they met with CIS staff. At first, we could not believe such Third World conditions existed in such a prosperous country as Australia. We invited Warin to the CIS as a Visiting Fellow to help Hughes write a report, 'A New Deal for Aborigines,' examining the reasons behind Baniyala's disadvantage.[1] Around this time, Warin and the leader of the Baniyala community, Djambawa Marawili, presented a seminar at the CIS and gave an interview for CIS' *Policy* magazine. Marawili emphasised he was not asking for charity for his community but help for their children to receive a proper education so they could work with their minds as well as their hands. With this began the CIS and the Rotarian Team's involvement in Baniyala.

When the CIS and Sydney Rotarians first visited Baniyala in 2005, they found startling evidence of how separate policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders—'an experiment with human lives costing billions of dollars'—had failed.[2] After 10 years of campaigning, the community had finally received a diesel-fuelled electricity generator to supply power to the community. But although the community's houses and a small office had power, the school did not. The Outstation Resource Agency responsible for Baniyala, Laynhapuy Homelands, and the NT Department of Education could not agree on which of them was responsible for the electricity costs.

The school building was a shambles and covered with graffiti. Scrap paper was strewn all over the two classrooms and there was no sign of books, pens or pencils. An English-speaking teacher visited the community for only a few hours, maybe once or twice a week. The rest of the time, the school was run by an Indigenous teacher and teaching aides who had received minimal training many

years earlier. Without ongoing training and professional development, their English literacy and numeracy skills had deteriorated. When the Rotarian Team had 29 of the school's children aged 5–17 tested for literacy, none were reading beyond Year 1 level; numeracy skills were the same. The community had been trying to persuade the NT Department of Education to provide a full-time resident teacher to teach their children English and basic literacy and numeracy; now they knew the extent of their children's neglect.

The community store, run by a non-Indigenous storekeeper, was rundown. Its refrigerators worked only sporadically so there was little fresh food. New houses had not been built for so many years that most of the 17 two- to three-bedroom houses had a family living in each bedroom; 143 people were living in 14 houses and a further 15 adults and children in makeshift houses/camps.

When Warin surveyed the community's health in 2005, she found 14 children with perforated ear drums, 7 children failing to thrive, 17 people with eye diseases, 21 people with skin diseases, 8 with rheumatic heart disease, and 5 with hypertension. Several young men in the community had been rushed to Adelaide for open heart surgery following untreated rheumatic fever damage. Blood sugar readings had never been taken by visiting nurses, and there was no attempt to manage and control suspected Type 2 diabetes with diet and medicine. The health centre was a derelict shed without a secure or refrigerated space to store medication. A nurse visited every six weeks or so, but no dentist had ever visited Baniyala. When tooth abscesses became acute, patients went to a hospital and had their teeth pulled out.

Each week, a special charter flight brought a delivery of kava from the Ganybu wholesaler operating out of the Laynhapuy Homelands Association in Yirrkala. When drunk in traditionally modest quantities, kava is fairly harmless. But the quantities supplied to the Baniyala community by Ganybu were enough to leave most adults in the community drugged for two to three days a week, with bloodshot eyes and skin that resembled a 'crocodile.'[3]

Economically, the community was almost totally dependent on welfare. Some residents received an income from art, notably

Djambawa Marawili, the leading artist and elder whose work is exhibited in Australia and overseas. The community also received a small payment from mud crabbing on Blue Mud Bay. But there was little to no other economic enterprise in Baniyala. Marawili's 4WD was the only vehicle serving the community (when there was money for fuel), and an expensive air charter service was the principal means of transport for the community.

The Rotarians who visited Baniyala in 2005 quickly found the community had been neglected by all the government departments and agencies responsible for supplying services to it. The elders told the Rotarians they wanted their people to be able to earn decent incomes and for their children to be educated in English to a mainstream standard so they could get jobs when they grew up. They also wanted proper health and dental services and better houses with bathrooms and kitchens. Similar to Aird and Staples' suggestion to identify needs in communities (p. 20), the Rotarians' discussion with the community led to a five-year step-by-step support plan. The first step was the construction of an art centre by the community's young men so artists had a place to store their materials and work, and a women's centre to provide a space for a pre-school and community gatherings. The Rotarians agreed to find the financial support to build the two centres, and the community agreed to provide 15 young men to help with the construction. The second step was to build a house for teachers so they could reside there and teach full time. In the meantime, the community was advised to continue writing to the government for more regular attendance by English-speaking teachers.

When construction on the arts and women's centres started, it soon became evident that the Baniyala workers did not know how to use a tape measure, divide a number in two, or use simple construction tools like hammers. Because nutrition was poor, they had great difficulty starting work on time and tended to tire after a couple of hours of work. The Rotarian Team persisted and the two buildings were built by the end of the 2006 dry season. The skills the workers acquired and the pride in their work was the beginning of the transformation of Baniyala.

The presence of the Team for months on the construction site made it impossible for the various levels of government to continue to ignore Baniyala, and in the same year, the community finally received a written response from the NT Minister for Employment, Education and Training stating: 'DEET will progress your application to establish a remote small school and the subsequent provision of a resident qualified teacher to provide an educational service for its children.' The letter also stated: 'DEET understands the need for housing and has lodged a submission with the Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport for a number of additional new dwellings.' However, the application for the teachers' house would first have to be included in the NT budget; as this could not be done before April 2007, it would take some time to build the house.

Following the CIS shining the spotlight on the problems facing Baniyala, other changes were also taking place in the community. Warin equipped the community's office with a computer so that residents could receive emails for the first time. A further six computers were also donated to the community by a contact of Buttfield. In 2006, the Commonwealth Department of the Environment constructed a ranger station in Baniyala as part of its Top End Ranger program. The Department of the Environment provided two 4WD vehicles and a six-metre boat with an outboard motor, and recruited 15 rangers from the community on part-time Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) wages (these have since been transferred to the Commonwealth Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities). A new health clinic was also built and a nurse came to Baniyala more often (every two weeks instead of every six).

The Baniyala community was advised that it was entitled to Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) funding from the Howard government for its teachers' house. However, once negotiations for the SRA began, obstacle after obstacle appeared. Aird and Staples say, 'Any community wishing to break away from established practices is likely to experience opposition from government departments/agencies' (p. 21), and this has definitely been

Baniyala's experience. The various bureaucratic parties involved all had different agendas, and it took the intervention of the then Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, for all parties to agree to an SRA, albeit with a compromise—the teachers' house would be called a Visiting Officers Quarters (VOQ) and accommodate only bureaucrats visiting Baniyala. Due to the delays in signing the SRA, construction could not start until late in the dry season when the weather was very hot. Nevertheless, on 1 November 2007, the three-bedroom, two-bathroom air-conditioned and fully equipped VOQ was completed—using local labour and supervised by the Rotarians.

Another important event to occur in 2007 was the Commonwealth government's suspension of kava imports. The community's health improved dramatically and residents were more alert and energetic. Despite difficulties with the shop (the non-Indigenous shopkeeper absconded with the store's takings), people were eating better as there was more cash for food and energy for fishing and hunting. The production of art substantially increased, bringing more income into the community. Residents formed a community band (Garrangali) and Saturday night discos replaced drunken kava nights.

When I visited Baniyala in 2009, I found it to be a peaceful and friendly community, superbly situated on the picturesque Blue Mud Bay. The community had opted to be alcohol free long before the Northern Territory Intervention and it was very quiet at night—no fighting and no loud music after 8 pm. The only sound I could hear was the hum of the electric generator. However, for a small community of only 160 people, there was a surprising amount of air traffic, as an incessant stream of Commonwealth and NT bureaucrats and non-government 'Aboriginal Industry' found a reason to visit.

Of note was a missionary group who turned up on Sunday with boxes of bananas to entice people to their church service (only a few people went) and Anglicare who turned up the day before I left to offer suicide prevention training. No one in Baniyala knew these groups were coming as Laynhapuy had organised the

visits but not informed anyone in the community. The suicide prevention training seemed pointless as there had been no suicides in Baniyala. Yet as Aird and Staples point out, the current 'orthodoxy' (p. 30) dominates, and services are often provided without any evaluation or assessment of need. Everyone at Baniyala seemed busy—whether it was working in the garden, mowing the lawn, driving the tractor to collect rubbish, digging wild yams, or fishing—they all seemed to have a sense of purpose and a spring in their step. That there is now hope in Baniyala can be attributed to the work of Buttfield and his team of Rotarians. Carl Wineberg, an electrical engineering executive from California and one of the 'old codgers,' summarised Baniyala's transformation when he said he thought he was in a different community to the one he had first seen in 2005.

As Aird and Staples suggest, ensuring ongoing progress in a community requires regular monitoring and assessment of priorities (p. 25). As a result of the community's unremitting concern with the education of their children and the support of the Rotarians, instead of a 'learning centre,' Baniyala finally got a school. In 2010, the NT Department of Education built the new Garrangali (Crocodile Nest) school with well-equipped classrooms, sheltered assembly areas, an ablutions block, and two new three-bedroom houses for teachers. A dedicated husband-and-wife team (principal and primary teacher) have transformed learning for the children at Baniyala, and mainstream literacy and numeracy are the central concern. Every morning at 8.25, loudspeakers mounted on the school roof announce the start of the school day. When I was there, I observed many children arriving at school early to play basketball and AFL. The community encourages school attendance by not serving children at the shop during school-time. Instruction is entirely in English, but three Aboriginal assistant teachers work full-time to translate to or from Yolgnu and otherwise help in the classroom. The improvements in the school saw it receive 'Highly Commended for Excellence in Improving School Attendance' in the NT 2012 Smart Schools Awards.

Since the problems with the education in Baniyala have now mostly been addressed, Buttfield and his team have turned their attention to establishing private housing and tourism in Baniyala. Housing has long been a critical concern for Baniyala families crowded into two-bedroom houses with no kitchens or bathrooms. However, outstations such as Baniyala are not eligible for public housing so the only way to gain new housing is through private housing. Private housing would also mean residents gain an asset they can pass on to their children.

Baniyala approached the Northern Territory Land Council (NLC) for 99-year-leases to housing blocks on its traditional lands, and the Rotarian Team helped the community organise a survey of home blocks and establish a homeowners association. However, once again the established orthodoxy, in this case the NLC, made change difficult. The NLC ignored Baniyala's application for 99-year leases and initially refused to meet to discuss leases with representatives either in Baniyala or Darwin. The Baniyala community petitioned the Australian Senate asking for the Minister of Indigenous Affairs to assist them in obtaining 99-year leases. Eventually, after more than a year NLC officials met Baniyala leaders. However, it appears the NLC does not think remote Indigenous residents should be entitled to the benefits of homeownership that all other Australians enjoy (including the First Home Owners grant), and continue to refuse to issue leases by arguing that 'leasing is not required for charitable construction on Aboriginal land.'[4] Fortunately, Marawili and the Baniyala community are not giving up. Together with Buttfield and his team of volunteers, they are continuing to advance the notion of private housing in Baniyala. Two two-bedroom transportable houses complete with beds; a kitchen with refrigerator, stove and washing machine; and bathrooms with a shower and flush toilet were built in 2012. These two-bedroom houses cost $150,000 each compared to a minimum cost of $450,000 for a public house. The houses are now occupied by very appreciative Baniyala families who are paying commercial rents until leasing and mortgage arrangements can be negotiated.

After several years of preparatory discussions with commercial tour operators, a number of tour groups visited Baniyala for the first time in 2012. They are 'tag-along' tours, where a tour leader in a 4WD leads groups driving their own 4WDs. The first group arrived in early July with 43 vehicles and 110 people! Baniyala men and women act as guides and commercial earnings are flowing to the community and to individuals.

As the Baniyala experience highlights, real change is possible if community members participate in the change process with the help of dedicated and competent support from people (change agents). Aird and Staples provide a blueprint and the steps necessary for communities to bring about change. What some people view as impossible is possible provided you have the will and the skill.

Endnotes

1 Helen Hughes and Jenness Warin, *A New Deal for Aborigines in Remote Communities*, Issues Analysis 54 (Sydney: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2005).

2 Alison Anderson, 'Address in Reply to the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly' (23 October 2012).

3 Paul Toohey, 'Life and death of a crisis,' *The Australian* (7-8 June 2008).

4 Natasha Robinson, 'Outstation petitions on bar to home grants,' *The Australian* (15 March 2012).

Sustainability of Indigenous Communities

Wesley Aird and Ron Staples

Social indicators of Indigenous disadvantage prove that the orthodox methods of delivering services to Indigenous people have not worked. The failure of these methods is also indicated by the proliferation of approaches trying to work around established orthodoxies. This paper sets out an alternative process, based on successful developmental methodologies used extensively around the world, by which Indigenous communities could work with their stakeholders to overcome disadvantage.

This is not a research paper; rather, it provides a logical development approach that can be implemented immediately. This paper also debunks the myth that it's too hard to make improvements in Indigenous affairs and that it will take a generation for change to occur, and instead, establishes how proven techniques can be used to make changes to service delivery straightaway. The consequent improvements will be measurable, save money, and achieve development change outcomes.

This paper calls for a reorientation in approaches to development interventions. After all, dissonant change is necessary to break out of the failed orthodoxy of grant funding by departmental silos, which in many cases are dysfunctional in their own right. These departments are made all the more ineffective by a failure of funding bodies to follow holistic, logical and participatory community development approaches. Dissonant change is also necessary to break away from depending on outdated modes of service delivery and representation by Indigenous organisations and their destructive power plays.

Obstructions to development posed by parallel political structures such as corporations and land councils must be reduced, or even better, removed.

The process must be objective so that the people of an area (community) will know in advance the choices available to them and when certain conditions are met or not met. The community must come to terms with the relationship between cause and effect, between means and ends. A dysfunctional community that is provided with relevant technical assistance and support will be able to develop and implement its own strategy for sustainable improvement.

Regardless of the type of methodologies used, the chances of success for any community development intervention depend on two factors: first, the community's will for change and the political will at the highest level of government (namely, the one that provides funds to subordinate program administrators), and second, the genuine participation of the intended beneficiaries and stakeholders in the change process. The higher government agency must not only provide leadership but also require demonstrable evidence that agreed improvements are being achieved as funds are spent. Presumably, the community will also want to see evidence of improvements.

Distribution of Indigenous communities

A discussion of the sustainability of remote Indigenous communities is both technical and emotional. Remote communities, very remote communities, homelands, and outstations are numerous and of varying size, resulting in wide-ranging arguments regarding their future. The more challenging communities tend to be in areas of restricted access due to geography, administration, climate, etc. The effects of isolation are exacerbated when the community is located away from a trade or transport route. In addition, there are substantial challenges in terms of governance and service delivery, and complex dramas of personality and culture.

Indigenous communities are not limited to any broad geographic band, and indeed, may exist anywhere in the country, even as suburbs within coastal cities. According to ABS data on the distribution of Indigenous population in 2006, the majority lived in major cities (31%). The remaining Indigenous population was evenly distributed across inner regional (22%), outer regional (23%), and remote/very remote Australia combined (24%).[2]

The concepts in this paper are not limited to remote communities, and may be applied to urban communities too.

Key terms

Group of beneficiaries: A 'group of beneficiaries' may include a select set of civic-minded individuals, a number of households, a suburb within a city, or even the majority of people within a geographic area. These are the people who get things done. The group does not need the consent of every resident within the community to initiate a development project—the orthodox methods of raising political support and funds come with far too many disincentives for full participation. Mindful of this, our methodology allows for what may well be a small group of forward-looking protagonists to make a start and then grow the group as the process unfolds and achievements become evident.

Stakeholders: The term 'stakeholders' is much broader than the 'group of beneficiaries' and includes a wide variety of agencies that have an interest in the community. Stakeholders may be both internal and external, and they may be community based agencies, government, non-government, volunteers, industry, advocacy groups, or any agency with a legitimate reason to conduct business with or within the community.

Beneficiaries: The term 'beneficiaries' defines those who will be directly and indirectly positively affected by the activity as evidenced in the social indicators of disadvantage.

Process: The 'process' outlined in this paper can start with a single meeting in someone's house and continue for a year or two until the conclusion of the development initiative. 'Process' is an all-encompassing term and is about a journey of change that will become evident in improvements to the social indicators of disadvantage.

Activity: An 'activity' is a specific component designed and implemented within the overall process and is intended to produce a very particular developmental result. An activity is described in detail and will have a very specific start, finish, resource requirement, and intended result.

The current situation

The history of Indigenous affairs is characterised by a top-down approach. Local activities are governed by over-arching policy frameworks. For example, a community adjacent to a well-subscribed transport route may have the capacity and aspirations to develop an economic base but may be unable to do so owing to administrative complications, which could include permits, land tenure (for financial security), constraints of collective governance, or just the personalities involved.

Under the current arrangements, services within a community and infrastructure may be seen, at least by the bureaucracy, more as a component in a regional program rather than as a specific need within a community. For example, a community may need a telephone for safety and emergencies, but installing or maintaining it may not be high on the list of priorities for the regional telephone network provider. Needs analyses are conducted rarely, if ever, but they are at the core of participatory development and a way for communities to identify priorities.

Though there is usually no shortage of money in Indigenous affairs, the statistics indicate a history of less than optimal results in terms of how or where the money is spent.[3] Departmental spending silos work against community development. Although government rhetoric

espouses 'one-stop shop' and 'whole-of-government' policies, program managers tend to spend their department's funds mindful only of their own departmental services and priorities.

In Indigenous affairs, there are enormous misunderstandings about the division of responsibility between the development of policy and its budget at the national level versus actual service delivery at the community level. The two have nothing in common in most circumstances. To put this in context, Indigenous affairs at the federal level are consistently in the media eye, so the casual observer could be forgiven for believing that the federal minister for Indigenous Affairs is responsible for absolutely everything to do with Indigenous Australia. In reality, the states and territories are responsible for delivering important day-to-day services with the greatest influence on the quality of Indigenous life such as policing, health, education and housing. When these services are neglected, whole communities suffer. Remote communities suffer all the more because they do not have the luxury of shopping around—there are no other alternatives. They are disadvantaged by their remoteness.

Results of the current orthodoxy

The outcome of the current orthodoxy is indicated by the social indicators of Indigenous disadvantage, which are all too familiar. Too many remote Indigenous communities are characterised by the breakdown of social mores and lack of infrastructure and essential services. In most cases, the residents of remote communities still live in the deep shadows of failed policies of past and current governments. Bureaucratic mismanagement and ideological tensions have resulted in the appalling conditions of so many discrete communities and billions of dollars wasted.

There is nothing new in the images of an Aboriginal person in a remote community living in squalid conditions, but the constancy of these images may result in a number of outcomes. An unfortunate outcome may be compassion burn-out—when good people do nothing because they think their efforts will only be a drop in the ocean or because nothing seems to have worked for years. An equally

problematic situation is when misguided compassion diminishes the rigour put into setting a course of corrective action.

The second scenario is more likely to give rise to the regular recycling of news stories about spending hundreds of millions of dollars more on housing[4] and health.[5] Perhaps the assumption is that no matter what else is wrong with a person's life, government is responsible for housing and health care, and that increased funds will magically result in people having long, happy and fulfilling lives. This is an example of misplaced focus and misplaced funds. Programs are designed, for example, on delivering houses (the object) rather than improving the livelihoods of people (the subject).

An alternate vision, and some assumptions

Albert Einstein is credited with having defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. This is an apt, if a somewhat unfortunate, description of the government's habit of throwing money at Indigenous issues instead of tackling them in partnership with communities. Too often, well-funded programs address the symptoms without addressing the cause. The object (or the program) is thrust at the subject (or the people) without discussion or collaboration between the people and the program managers.

The solution to building safe and sustainable communities is not necessarily more money. A community without economic opportunities, access to services, and confidence is not sustainable. A community without economic opportunities cannot provide safe, vibrant and meaningful lives no matter how much the government spends on housing, police or alcohol management. Without translating and developing a vision into strategies based on genuine partnership with the beneficiaries, money spent by government on housing, health, police or alcohol management cannot achieve the desired improvements in livelihoods.

It is pointless to repeat the failed policies of the past. It is time for dissonant change with an alternate vision.

Choosing an approach

There are two general approaches in community development: the problem-solving approach and the strengths-based approach. Both approaches have the same aim but differ in methodology. Both approaches place people first and involve their participation and ownership of strategies, priorities and results. This paper focuses more on the problem-solving approach.

Problem analysis involves identifying the main problems and establishing the cause-and-effect relationships between them. The key purpose is to identify the 'root causes' of the problem(s); these causes, and not just the symptoms, are addressed in the subsequent initiative design phase.[6] It is vital for the people in a community to gain ownership of the problems by identifying what they are and how they can be tackled.

The strengths-based approach is based on talking to the community about what has worked for it in the past and how to bring about change in the context of its experiences and capabilities.

To have a chance at overcoming poverty and dependence in communities, four substantial conditions must be met by the government:

- accepting that not all communities are sustainable or the same
- giving the community a genuine say in its direction, that is, ensuring the community participates in problem identification and design of solutions
- providing (or allowing) a resident change agent
- participating in good faith

1. Sustainability

The first assumption is that some communities are sustainable while others are not. It is unreasonable for any community to ignore its own economic prospects while expecting to be maintained at taxpayers' expense regardless of its living conditions or current or prospective contribution to its own maintenance. We are not

suggesting that such a community should be closed down. Rather, after a rigorous process of evaluation and capacity building, the government should discuss the continuation and extent of investment options with the community and the issues surrounding closing or relocating the community. The community in such circumstances needs to identify the problem of its sustainability and participate in identifying a solution with the help of a facilitator, if necessary. No community is the same as another: economic circumstances and history may provide opportunities to one community that do not exist for another.

2. Genuine say

The second assumption is that the process will work only if the community has a genuine say in its direction. For a remote community to be sustainable it must be given an even chance or at least a fair go. It must be involved in identifying a vision for the future, the methods involved in attaining the vision, and the opportunities to manage the achievement of the vision using community resources and government services. In circumstances where a community's expectations or standards of service delivery do not fit with policy or program funding guidelines, the guidelines must be changed by policymakers and bureaucratic management. More importantly, the government's current bureaucratic mindset must change from delivering a one-size-fits-all program to providing services identified by the community to meet its specific needs. We need to move away from pre-determined program delivery (the object) and instead focus on improving livelihoods (the subject).

3. Change agent

The third assumption is there must be a change agent (a champion of change) residing in the community. It is critical to the success of the initiative that the small group of those in the community wanting change are matched with a change agent. It would be preferable for the community if the change agent was local to the community;

however, it will most likely be an outsider. Similarly, the change agent may well be non-Indigenous. If a dysfunctional, or even struggling community, is to move ahead it should agree to appoint a person with a strong technical background in development methodologies. The countryside is littered with failed community development projects, mainly because the community chose someone to assist them based not on their skill but Aboriginality, their familial connection to the community, or because the person had worked with Indigenous people somewhere else. If communities are to be sustainable, they must demand and secure assistance from a change agent with the best possible skills set. A mechanism must be available to the community to recommend a replacement change agent if the nominee proves to be incompetent.

Sustainable improvements will not come about by rehashing the failed approaches and failed characters of the past. To move ahead, a community must not, we repeat, *must not* hire a person in the '3Ms' category of workers who have plagued Aboriginal communities for decades. The 3Ms can be missionaries (a loosely applied term and refers more to zealotry than religion), mercenaries (but not military ones, obviously), and misfits. Change agents from the 3Ms are rarely technically competent.

In a radical departure from the history of Indigenous affairs, and in particular remote communities, there is a requirement for a very specific skills set. Oddly, there are numerous technically skilled people in Australia with experience in development initiatives throughout the world.

4. Government must participate in good faith

The fourth assumption is that government will be genuine and play its role in good faith. Government should recognise that decades of bad policy and bad funding decisions have resulted in the current mess. All levels of government must play a part in resolving the mess. It simply isn't good enough for government to defer involvement by saying that each community is entirely responsible for its internal conflicts.

Communities *and* government staff must learn from their involvement in the development process. Many government staff will require training or re-training. Some will need to 'unlearn' what they have learned over the past years. Some will need to enhance their skills in initiative design, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation to better manage the community development process. The role of government in this process should be clearly defined and made known to communities.

Putting a new approach into action

The next step in initiating change is to draw on strategies from international successes in community development. The intended group of beneficiaries should pinpoint problems, identify needs, and then devise practical solutions. As with many of life's challenges, if we do not accurately understand or define the problem, there is little chance of coming up with a successful solution.

The development process suggested here is based on treating a community as a mix of compatibilities and conflicts operating in close geographic proximity rather than any sort of collective or homogeneous 'whole.' However, individuals are brought together by a common purpose. Indigenous communities all too often comprise monstrously complex layers of administration, funding and accountability, each being solidly encased in portfolio silos with competing interests. Some will not want to change the status quo no matter how desperate the situation is.

The early participants

The early participants (or group of beneficiaries) set the agenda for positive change. Within any given community, there is usually a small group of residents with sufficient resolve and purpose—and who genuinely want a better life for themselves, their children, and their community. The important thing is to make a start.

The quest for the holy grail of consensus is killing Aboriginal culture because every government department painfully consults communities within two and half centimetres of their lives, and in doing so, manages to simultaneously delay action and avoid accountability. It is almost impossible to ever reach community-wide consensus—and this must be recognised. These so-called consultations are nothing more than expensive theatre because most participants do not have the technical capacity to meaningfully engage on the issue.

We don't need a consensus to initiate the process of change, only an agreement.

Early engagement may be no more than a series of exploratory meetings and discussions to gauge community sentiment. As trust develops, there may be opportunities to refine or amend the process. Later on, as more people see developmental activities, and even initial modest successes, the number of participants will grow. Success and involvement will build automatically.

The process could be initiated by key community members approaching government or by an outside agency capable of acting as an intermediary between the community and government. This scenario is most likely to occur when key community members have a strong relationship with industry partners. Conversely, the process could be initiated by a government agency approaching some community members known to aspire for change. In this scenario, government must avoid imposing a solution and ensure that the initiative genuinely belongs to the community. Even so, there must be an agreed point of entry into the 'community' that is acceptable to its leadership.

Resources and skills: An early need

The group of beneficiaries might start with their own resources, but momentum and commitment can only be sustained if there is an underlying support mechanism. This is where the process calls for a change agent, who most likely will come from outside the community, has technical developmental expertise, and most importantly, has common sense. The group of beneficiaries will need

to be aware of the types of people to not hire and also to switch change agents if required.

The change agent will need to be resourced, the cost of which can be kept to a minimum if the identification of needs is handled in a timely manner and professionally facilitated (or as in the case in Baniyala, some members volunteer their services).

Identifying needs—and the importance of participation

The process of identifying needs can be done with the intended beneficiaries in a few sessions spread over a couple of days so the group of beneficiaries gain a sense of progress at an early stage. They must identify and understand the problems that contribute to the day-to-day disadvantages within their community. They must undertake the identification of the problems (problem and needs analysis). The manner in which this is done is very important as it leads to the ownership of the problems and initialises the ownership of the development process (the journey) by the participating intended beneficiaries.

Techniques for identifying needs and eliciting group participation have been trialled and proven in the international arena.

Not all members of the broader community will involve themselves at this early stage of the development process; there will be naysayers and abstentions. There is no point delaying the process in the misguided belief that every single member of the community needs to be involved from the outset. Also, there is no sense in continuing the development process if there is no group interest in doing so. Over time, the detractors will see the benefits being achieved and will become involved, usually without losing face.

The group of beneficiaries is likely to underestimate the difficulty of the task ahead, especially on two fronts. First, they might lack clarity as to the enormousness of the task. After all, there is nothing easy or instant about turning around a troubled situation. Second, they may face a more insidious challenge from those who, all things being equal, should be supporters of the process. These may be

fellow Aborigines, bureaucrats or do-gooders. Any community (or member of a community) wishing to break away from established practices is likely to experience opposition from government department sagencies. In any case, a community, or a sub-group within the community, that seeks to break away from the orthodoxy can reasonably expect to be subject to pressure to conform from both within and outside the community.

The group of beneficiaries needs to understand that if the pressure on the participants in the community becomes too much, it's better to 'walk away' or postpone to a more conducive time following a subtle 'education' of at least the outside detractors.

Each member of the community must be given an opportunity to contribute to setting minimum and necessary standards for that community. Not all will take up this opportunity.

In reality, various communities may well have leaders with positional power through dint of an organisation or a connection to a resource stream. In some cases, the so-called leaders may not have any actual authority or the respect of their community. This increases the importance of engaging with the whole community wherever possible. Understanding the blocking forces at play increases the need to ensure the process gauges the genuine community sentiment and not just the loudest or most recent opinion. The group of beneficiaries can avoid focusing on community deficits by allocating relatively less discussion time on the negatives and more on the positives.

The task at this point is to just list the most apparent problems in brief statements relating to different aspects of community life such as dust, reliability of equipment, price of groceries, sanitation, education and housing. Essentially, the participating community group would construct a problem tree. The result will most likely be a comprehensive collection of negative statements.

The next task is to identify the core problems, which are the ones that seem to be linked to most (or at least a large portion) of the negative statements. The group must also look at the concept of cause and effect. A cause is a negative statement that leads to the core problem occurring, or an example of the core problem, whereas an effect is something that happens as a result of the core problem.

Participatory cause and effect recognition is important and further develops the appreciation of group ownership of the causes and effects of the situation.

Having identified the main problems and the cause-and-effect relationship between them, the group of beneficiaries now considers the impact of the problems and the roles and interests of different stakeholders. The group will learn in more detail about the inter-related nature of problems, and how they are perceived by the various stakeholders. Various problems may have a number of aspects, including, though not limited to, social, economic, environmental or administrative. Putting effort into understanding these relationships will later help in developing solutions, identifying risks, and mitigating strategies to address the risks.

The product will be a chart (or a 'problem tree') that clearly places the many negative statements in a cause-and-effect hierarchy to help understand the events that *led* to the core problem and the events that are a *result* of the core problems. The layout of the chart should be tested for logic so that the community is clear as to which items *caused* problems and which ones are a *result* of the problems. Some items will be identified as constraints outside the scope of the community's influence.

So far, the group of beneficiaries have been looking at a 'glass half empty.' It is now time to look at it as half full. The group must now take the negative *problem* statements and turn them into positive *objective* statements by constructing an 'objective tree' from the 'problem tree.' The objective statements form the basis of another chart to demonstrate a set of logical connections and analyse *means-end* relationships. The findings from the stakeholder analysis will be necessary to understand and reality-test the logic (stakeholder analysis is explained below). The logic goes roughly along the lines of, 'If we achieve this objective, will it erase the relevant problem?'

As the group of beneficiaries set the objective statements, they will have made a logical progression from understanding core problems to listing activities with the greatest potential of improving their lives. Importantly, these activities will have a sound basis in the community's

circumstances and be realistic in terms of the interests, capacities and motivations of the various stakeholders.

The process of sorting the problems hierarchically and establishing the objective statements (or activities) will require a reasonable level of technical skill to produce an effective product capable of delivering genuine improvements in a community. The ZOPP approach (or Zielorientierte Projektplanung, known elsewhere as the GOPP approach for Goal Oriented Project Planning) developed by the German aid organisation is a practical tool kit for undertaking problem and objective analysis in a participatory way with intended beneficiaries.

Identification of stakeholders

For most Indigenous communities, the list of stakeholders will be quite long and cover three levels of government and departments, numerous incorporated entities, and businesses. There may be even more divisions of stakeholders within the community. Stakeholders who are involved in the change process directly affecting the beneficiaries group are identified, and their influence on the group is analysed by the participating group. The crux is participation by the intended beneficiaries in all activities of the development process. The group of beneficiaries identify the stakeholders facilitated by a change agent-facilitator.

It is not workable to have a long list of stakeholders attempting to engage with the group of beneficiaries on a regular basis (this is, after all, the current failed service delivery model). Instead, the group will need to find some sort of a workable equilibrium of full participation or representation. The mechanism for stakeholder engagement must be carefully conceived, and its effectiveness monitored over time and changed as necessary. The picture of the context (the strengths-based approach) must be painted by the stakeholders, linked to the earlier argument of the 'good faith' of government agencies, and must be agreed upon by the intended beneficiaries and stakeholders along with the objectives identified through the problem-objectives analysis.

Beneficiaries and stakeholders: Working together

At this point, the separate groups of beneficiaries and stakeholders come together and discuss the needs that have been identified—not to criticise or prioritise them but to understand them from the perspective of each participant. Some may be intended beneficiaries, some may be service providers or from the law or a church, while others may want to be involved in commerce.

This could be the first of many valuable learning experiences for both groups; however, the opportunity will be squandered if it is run as a top-down government project or if the relationships or extant business activities are seen as immutable. To be successful, the process requires skilled and authoritative representatives at all levels of government involvement.

A small team of committed leaders with individual responsibilities should have been formed by now, including key members from the group of beneficiaries identified by the participating intended beneficiaries, stakeholders such as federal and state or territory government representatives, and even some local businesses. This group becomes an intensive working and research group but is not the group of decision-making intended beneficiaries. The intended beneficiaries as a group must take decisions following recommendations by the working group. The role of the decision maker is important with the working group taking an 'educative' role with the intended beneficiaries and not one of direction. One must convince through awareness and education and not directives.

Resources and skills

The development process participants will need to be supported (or managed in larger communities) by a technically competent change agent-facilitator.

From this point onwards in this paper, the terms 'change agent' and 'facilitator' are interchangeable. The facilitator may be the change agent in the earlier stages; however, depending on the size of the community and the complexity of issues, the expert negotiation skills

and proficiency in developmental techniques of a facilitator may be required in the later stages to deal with the large number of agencies.

As before, the process should have government support and funding.

Know when to walk away

Not all initiatives can reach a conclusion. As the initial stage nears completion, it would be a good time for the process participants, both beneficiaries and stakeholders, to examine the feasibility of the process and 'walk away' if required. Participants may be disillusioned, decide to suspend or postpone the process for another day, or decide that the conditions required to support the process are not present and 'walk away' to come back at a more appropriate time.

The process will fail if it is artificially propped up. It should be discontinued if it does not have genuine community participation with a consensus on responsibilities and a management mechanism. Quite simply, an enduring principle for the life of the initiative must be 'no community participation, no process.'

Monitoring should start early

Monitoring is crucial in the community development process. It provides the process with much more value than just accountability. It adds value to the knowledge base and process management so that all participants are aware of the effects of their initiative during the process and can use this information to improve the design and the implementation of the initiative.

Even at this early stage, the beneficiaries and stakeholders must agree on how to monitor the process and its outcomes. Beneficiaries and stakeholders must identify the intended outcomes from the objectives. Monitoring shouldn't occur at milestones identified by the government alone but rather in partnership with the beneficiaries. Monitoring should relate to activities and their results—and the effects these results are having on outcomes from the achievement of objectives. This monitoring process must be a joint venture; where competency does not exist in the beneficiaries' group, training must be provided to

enable participation. The facilitator should provide technical input in discussions about monitoring and assist community participants and stakeholders in making decisions.

Learning and unlearning, by all participants

The old model of service delivery has been less than optimal. There is no genuine connection between the supply and demand sides of the equation. In the new approach, the intended beneficiaries and stakeholders come together to learn from each other. A clear distinction is necessary between the *identification of needs*, which is done by those who need the benefit, and the *learning* by all stakeholders. At this point, beneficiaries and stakeholders may need to *unlearn* practices from the old orthodoxy.

For example, insisting on consensus is an old practice that must be unlearned. For government agencies to require proof of every single community member's support hinders the process at every stage, imposes unnecessary delays, and indirectly gives a disgruntled, unscrupulous minority the power of veto over the rest of the community. Members come from different points of view, and a select few dissonant voices should not be allowed to stall the process.

The group of beneficiaries, as members of the community, would have endured decades of the top-down service delivery model. They would, therefore, have to make an upward adjustment to their expectations for the quality of life within the community.

Stakeholders need to be educated so they can participate in the process at the same level. Many of the stakeholders might have been part of the top-down service delivery model and will come to the process with a particular mindset, which may be inappropriate for the changing paradigm.

Stakeholder analysis

The next step is to make sense of all the information and aspirations gathered so far by figuring out each stakeholder's contribution to the problem; the extent to which the stakeholders are affected

by the problem; their capacity and motivation for solving the problem; and their relationship with other stakeholders (partnership or conflict).

The list of stakeholders will have been identified earlier in the process. Many of the stakeholders external to the community will be actively participating in the process to varying degrees, and the extent of this involvement must be clearly defined.

Some legitimate stakeholders may absent themselves from the process even though their actions greatly influence the quality of life of the community. This is acceptable provided these stakeholders are aware of what is being attempted but decide to 'walk away.' They may enter the process at a later time if they feel their concerns have been addressed. However, they must make their reasons for 'walking away' known to the participating beneficiaries group.

The product from this stage is a complex set of relationships that will prove to be valuable when reality testing proposed activities. Despite the stakeholders' sound understanding of a community's social, economic and procedural requirements and benefits, no amount of planning without participation from the intended beneficiaries is going to guarantee positive changes. So the stakeholder analysis must ensure a level of pragmatism and must be performed in participation with the intended beneficiaries. Stakeholder analysis is not a desk analysis but in the field involving intended stakeholder and beneficiary participants.

Community

Next, the community (beneficiaries) are analysed by the intended beneficiaries with the assistance of a facilitator to identify capacity and willingness to bring about change; examine divisions within the community; and examine the agencies and service delivery mechanisms within the community. The analysis must assess the nature and value of current government investment in the community. Without fear or favour, the community must identify the roles of all local incorporated associations.

This analysis adds to the stakeholders' learning process. The service deliverers will be better informed about the constraints confronting their clients (the intended beneficiaries).

Corporations

The participatory approach to problem identification, stakeholder and community analysis (see above) is not corporation-centric. Ideally, through this process the group of beneficiaries would objectively analyse the current and continued existence of corporations based in, or servicing, the community. Organisations established for the purpose of receiving grants may or may not have a legitimate subsequent role in a development paradigm. To artificially attempt to prop them up by continued funding without establishing their value to the community will potentially jeopardise the process. On the other hand, the development change agent will need to be mindful of the outcome of cutting funding prematurely—and inform the intended beneficiaries group accordingly of such consequences so that objective decisions can be taken. This reinforces the need for technically proficient practitioners/facilitators/change agents.

One of the greatest disasters inflicted on Aboriginal communities is government reliance on corporations (usually established under separate Indigenous-specific legislation) to administer Indigenous-specific grant funding as a de facto form of service delivery.

All levels of government rely on Indigenous-specific bodies to spend government money but without holistic planning or needs analysis.[7] On a service level, this results in inefficient and fragmented services with gaps and overlaps. On a social level, funding creates rivalry and jealousy with the potential to divide communities, usually along family lines. To make it a complete train wreck, there is no monitoring or evaluation. In the extant service delivery paradigm, there is rarely a causal link between inputs (funding) and outcomes; and between funding and the actual needs of the community. Where multiple funding and delivery agencies are involved, meaningful accountability is all but impossible to impose. The current approach is to account

for expenditure instead of measuring benefits achieved (results). The services to be delivered become the subject and the receivers of the services the object.

An extension of the damage inflicted by relying on incorporated bodies is the related topic of vested interests. When a remote community relies on grant funding as its primary source of income, the community is on its way to welfare dependency. Office-bearers and beneficiaries will go to great lengths to attract funds from government agencies, which will most likely oblige in providing funds according to the silo of departmental priorities, regardless of actual community needs. The services become the subject.

The model of corporation-as-service-deliverer maintains a community as perpetually reactive to departmental priorities. When spread across a broad range of agencies, the result is an unending stream of bureaucratic visits and meetings; mountains of paperwork by ill-equipped community members in applications and acquittals; and the inability to break out of the funding cycle because the community is so busy or so blinded.

The popular albeit outdated model of corporation-as-service-deliverer does not fit well with this hybrid model of community development because the model in this paper is designed to address the needs defined by and prioritised by the community. Intended beneficiaries identify these needs and development objectives in conjunction with stakeholders, with a partnership of beneficiaries and stakeholders implementing the activities necessary to achieve these needs. Monitoring provides the evidence to record achievements and for undertaking analysis by the beneficiaries and stakeholders. Participation and not direction is the key. However, this does not exclude the need for effective and efficient management.

Government

In the current orthodoxy, it is not uncommon for communities to be regularly visited by an excessive and unmanageable number of government and non-government agencies. In certain cases, the

current system also provides for the wishes of the community to be subjugated to the orthodoxy of political bodies purporting to be acting in the best interests of the community regardless of the outcome.

In the process set out herein, the stakeholders are brought together (or at the very least, meaningfully engaged) so that this orthodoxy can be challenged and strategies identified and justified for the intended beneficiaries.

It is now time to call upon the fourth assumption, namely that government must act in good faith. Government agencies must see their policies and actions for the effect they have on communities. If the aim is to help the community overcome disadvantage, government representatives must not justify unhelpful practices or make any assumptions regarding the social dynamics, regardless of the apparent authority of the persons speaking the loudest, or with the most funding. If all goes well, these social dynamics and arrangements within the community will be a part of the community analysis that enables government partners to learn and understand the community.

Most funding decisions in the past have not delivered anywhere near the desired benefits. There are a number of reasons for this. When seeking funds, an application may have been misguided but technically correct, so funding was provided even though the project was of little benefit to the community. The community might have applied for funding where it thought it had a good chance of winning, as against more difficult funding that would address higher priority social problems. A department may have provided funding on an application but without having adequately analysed local or even regional needs. In the old orthodoxy, it's most likely that there would not have been any evaluation of the benefit (or otherwise) of the funding, and so government funding may well have been provided year after year for no good reason. Needs identification and objectives setting are critical to achieving effective change. The destination of the journey (objective) must be clearly identified with activities designed and resources made available.

The process outlined in this paper will most likely expose poor funding decisions of the past, and this may not be appreciated by a number of stakeholders. It would be entirely human to seek to

obstruct or at least frustrate such scrutiny. Mindful of this very human reaction, the process should involve learning lessons from the past and moving forward. A stakeholder who is either unwilling or unable to fit in with the new approach is to be eliminated because the continued participation by such a stakeholder can potentially jeopardise the entire process.

Private sector and any other organisations

Private sector commercial organisations, non-government organisations, philanthropists, volunteers—all may have activities underway or intended for a community. These too will need to be identified and evaluated in the stakeholder analysis. The group of beneficiaries must be clear how a private sector organisation can meet the needs identified by the community. Analysis of this situation would be undertaken during the community analysis by the beneficiaries group.

Some volunteer organisations in the community may already be providing a service that rightly sits with a government agency resulting in duplication or allowing government to conveniently escape responsibility. Where an outside agency is involved, the community must understand the motivations behind the decisions. Inflexibility on the part of the government may jeopardise the chances of the initiative's success.

The stakeholder analysis may well discover that not all stakeholders want the community to improve. Certain businesses thrive on the dysfunction and addiction of others. In the pursuit of profits, these businesses may well insist on continuing to inflict damage on the community—and in many cases this won't be illegal. However, the intended beneficiaries must be made aware of this situation and must take decisions in relation to future operations, and where required, convince the community at large of the benefits of change. Such an approach may be time consuming, a problem that needs to be recognised. Without doubt, though, it is the community and no outside organisation that should be responsible for taking the decision for change.

Possible contributions to the process—the social agreement

The stage is now set to analyse possible contributions to the improvement process. The contributions will be different for each participant, and the group of beneficiaries and stakeholders should reach some form of a social agreement at this point.

The stakeholder analysis would have highlighted any impediments to ensuring an agency delivering exactly what the beneficiaries want. In the new approach, the services are the object; the beneficiaries are the subject; and the results are measured in livelihood changes.

The contributions are not determined by existing policies or programs but set earlier when the group of beneficiaries and the stakeholders prioritised problems and established objective statements to address the needs. The next step is to determine the required services, how to provide those services, and the responsibilities of each stakeholder. The extent of stakeholder contribution is to be clarified; the issue is as much the *how* as the *what*. Community development techniques will need to be used to address the *how*. However, these techniques can be effectively used only where the community has genuinely addressed the *what*. The community must believe in the value of participating in the identification, design and management of needed services. This value will be evidenced in the community's willingness to maintain and in some instances contribute to the public or economic services provided, where they can, after they are provided. The community will need to be very clear as to its capacity and genuine preparedness to maintain the services.

For the process outlined in this paper to work, the wide variety of government and non-government agencies will have to actively participate with the beneficiaries and stakeholders in preparing the plan and activities. It simply isn't good enough for an agency to pop up after the event and declare, for instance, that the plan or activity isn't a good policy match for them. This approach is contrary to the concept of partnership that is currently so

popular with government. In such circumstances, the agency (or multiple agencies) should consider 'walking away' from the process.

Framing a social agreement

After framing a social agreement with clearly defined strategies, responsibilities, accountabilities, management arrangements, and resources, the community puts together activities and standards for various services. Some of these standards may fall under federal, state or territory authority.

As the community explores standards and services, it must also pay attention to motivation. For most Australians of working age, an obvious motivation would be a job that provides for personal needs and wants and/or those of their family. The quality of education or the manner in which it is delivered can be a motivator, provided there is an evident, realistic outcome. For example, the notion of increased school attendance is admirable but there must also be something at the end that motivates children to attend school day after day.

Conversely, there must also be an understanding of disincentives. For instance, an education is not necessary for a life on welfare. It will be difficult to motivate students to attend school when there is no local economy, there is limited transport or mobility, and there are limited aspirations and vision. A student is unlikely to be motivated to rise above family expectations of education, which may be extremely low, especially in a household of functional illiteracy, unemployment and hopelessness. All this is in a community that suffers a string of bad teachers in an under-resourced school. For its part, as an incentive, government may provide resources to the school based on attendance. Needs analysis is an effective tool that draws intended beneficiaries into discussion surrounding the circumstances mentioned above.

In this example, the community and process participants must come to terms with the many facets of this fundamental tenet of

Australian society. Low standards of education services may be attributed to actions and decisions by both government and the community. By extension, improvements in education can only come about with change from both the government and the community. This is why it is important to build partnerships based on understanding. However, motivation to participate in education and the provision of effective education services may be coupled with the need for employment opportunities and business potential—both of which should be drawn out in discussion during the needs analysis.

The next task for the process participants is to work out the extent to which the community wants to (and, more importantly, is prepared to) improve its living conditions. If it wants the same opportunities as mainstream Australians, that is great, but the community must be made aware that such opportunities come with obligations. There is a lot of wisdom in the saying, 'Be careful what you wish for.' Projections of the community into the future might see such indicators as safe households, children attending school, and a reasonable level of economic participation. Or the community might focus on easily measurable standards relating to power, water, sanitation and household food intake. In other words, what would the community look like if it were functioning well? What is normal for the region? What is normal in comparison to the rest of the country?

The minimum standard of life in remote Aboriginal communities should be no different to the rest of the country. Without limiting the expectations, as a minimum, households should be safe and nurturing, children should attain a reasonable level of education appropriate for their age, and there should be a reasonable level of household economic participation. For each of these aims, there must be an objective and empirical standard by which the group of beneficiaries or the broader community can measure performance over time. This could be along the lines of a commitment to service; for instance, the community is provided with a particular service, to a particular standard, for a particular period of time.

Facilitated discussions on standards of services will raise issues of thresholds and viability. Again using our education example, attendance at school is required by law up to a certain age.

Most education departments ignore this basic requirement in relation to Indigenous children, particularly in remote areas. At the same time, government is prepared to invest millions in other departments for all the subsequent social, corrective and legal services necessary to deal with disengaged, under-educated and under-qualified youth. It is a problem that a valuable education only becomes viable when it is supported by a catchment population of a certain size, which in turn may have substantial resource implications or introduce the need for regular transport services. The quality of the curriculum and the quality of the teachers are altogether different matters; however, these must be addressed by the process participants in a genuine spirit of problem solving and collaboration.

This is not a trigger to re-enter endless consultations. In the model of community development set out in this paper, the priority, quality and methods of service delivery for many services can be genuinely addressed as an integral part of the process.

Prioritising needs

The community members and stakeholders now need to give a formal structure to the activities listed so far in a tabular or some other user-friendly format containing the following items:

- the **vision**, or higher order objective and intended outcomes as well as the various indicators of achievement
- the development **objective** and intended outcomes, as well as the various indicators of achievement
- outputs and intended outcomes, as well as the various indicators of achievement
- activities and their implementation scheduling and milestones, and
- resources and resource providers.

With a document of this detail, it would be easy to estimate the cost of achieving each development objective. It would also be possible to

identify the people or organisations that could deliver services for the best return on investment.

Many of the tasks and services set out in the prioritised plan will already form a part of normal governance and service delivery. However, by now the group of beneficiaries should be astutely aware how some services have either failed to deliver or have actually contributed to community division and dysfunction.

It is highly unlikely that this logic will represent a large 'demand' for additional community funding. Instead, it will most likely deliver existing services more effectively to bring about meaningful improvements that represent value for money and hold people accountable for standards of service.

Given the existing inefficiencies in Indigenous affairs, it is highly likely that this process will require less funding, not more. In some cases, services previously presented as a privilege may actually turn out to be an entitlement.

Selecting the first activity

The next step is to choose an appropriate first activity (or address the highest priority needs first) and plan its implementation properly—not only because of its importance to the beneficiaries but also to use it as a learning experience. The first activity should also test some policy frameworks so service providers can understand the benefits and cost-effectiveness of the community driven approach. All participants (beneficiaries and stakeholders) should learn (and in some cases un-learn) as the process develops, especially from the well-designed and implemented monitoring regime. For example, a small, prioritised activity designed as a learning experience should be the first activity. Consideration should be given to a tangible and practical activity such as a boat ramp to improve communications and or transport.

Satisfied with the logic of the first activity, the process participants should then determine the tasks, resources and responsibilities to achieve the desired outcome, which in the boat ramp example is

improved communication evidenced by the community's boat collecting mail and essential consumer goods weekly.

Implementing the first activity

Participants are to adhere as best they can to the agreed mechanism for implementing, monitoring and learning (and un-learning) the standards of the service. Once underway, the people working on the activity will need to work with the community members and stakeholders to bring about changes in behaviour and service delivery. In turn, this work will need to be measured and verified. If the activity is outsourced, the intended beneficiary group should be identified in the selection of the contractor and signatory to the contract. The beneficiary group should be responsible for progress payments following acceptance of the quality of the work completed by the contractor. The beneficiary group would be responsible for value for money and effective use of government financial resources.

Participation within the community

The group of beneficiaries will most likely appoint a smaller sub-group of people to conduct the day-to-day management activities throughout the community development process. This sub-group will report back to the community at designated intervals. Although the whole community may not be active participants, every member must be able to know the status of the development process. Publicity (transparency) is an important accountability instrument for those responsible for implementing the initiative.

The operations of this sub-group require governance arrangements and competence in governance procedures, along with training and mentoring. Shortcomings can be identified in the capability of individuals during the process, which should be addressed by the most effective means through formal or informal training, or a combination of both. The community may require a governance mentor, or the facilitator could perform this role.

Raising awareness within the community is required for individuals to effectively participate in the development process. Individuals need to develop their skills in the development process, resource management, and awareness-raising techniques to properly inform the community. In this context, resource management is not the same as the financial management involved in running a business. Rather, it is more along the lines of managing limited resources and making sure the community gets value for money from each input. Financial accountability is important, especially where community organisations receive government funds. More often than not, divisions or factions in the community will arise from a financial scandal or rumour of one.

There is an opportunity for individuals to gain real employment and satisfaction from effectively managing the community development process. The notion of volunteerism should be minimised (excepting genuine skills transfer), and volunteer work should be seen as professional and remunerated accordingly.

The facilitator (or change agent)

The facilitator must be technically proficient in community development, not just another re-badged public servant or one of the 3Ms. For its part, the community should demand and be provided with the best possible assistance. The most successful facilitators are from within the community itself; however, it will not always be possible to find one. University education is not necessary for this role because the essential skills are 'applied common sense.' Having said that, the environment in which the work is to be done will substantially add to its complexity.

The process should include monitoring the performance of the facilitators so that the community itself develops and endorses the appropriateness, structure and content of proposed changes, while government representatives can feel satisfied that the concepts are reasonable.

Resources will be needed as well

The planning process will inevitably create expectations and these need to be managed. These expectations can provide the community with the hope that their solutions are achievable, and this commitment and momentum should not be squandered. At this stage, funds should be applied to address the highest priority needs identified earlier.

In reality, there should not be any resistance to funding, given that earlier examinations would have identified inefficiencies in government funding. However, there is every likelihood that the government will be loath to allocate the funds. Based on past performance, some program managers would prefer to continue to spend millions of dollars on uneconomic high profile projects with poor outcomes rather than work with the community to turn a welfare money drain into a sustainable community. Circumstances such as this may require the intended beneficiaries group seeking funding from sources other than the government. Addressing this situation would be part of the participatory design and involve stakeholders and intended beneficiaries in designing the activity.

The importance of monitoring

The community must be involved in identifying the outcomes and the indicators of success and monitoring activities in a number of technical ways in what is called participatory monitoring. An effective mechanism is self-monitoring the process using indicators selected by the community. More formal satisfaction surveys of the stakeholders could be conducted at specified intervals. Another technique is monitoring by outsiders (i.e. independent of the stakeholders). Various indicators could be used to demonstrate the level of engagement, including community contributions (financial, individual or collective); number of complaints (formal and informal); number of community management meetings; number of participants at the meetings; and so forth. It is very important that 'the journey' throughout the change process is monitored, for there is much to learn during the travels. Tools for identifying

objectives and outcomes and the indicators for monitoring their achievement and the experiences of 'the journey' are available.

There is always the possibility of the financial partner becoming heavy handed in monitoring. This is a prescription for failure but can be guarded against by developing monitoring arrangements in the spirit of participation and equity. The financial partner must argue for including monitoring indicators in the participatory monitoring arrangements. Community contributions to the process, even if not financial in nature, are as valuable as the resources made available by the government.

Publicity provides for transparency and enables beneficiaries and stakeholders to see how the initiative is progressing and whether results are being achieved.

Change and flexibility

If stakeholders cannot be flexible, they may have to 'walk away' or be 'fired' by the community as their continued participation may jeopardise the process. Monitoring will provide the information to enable stakeholders to assess the performance and effectiveness of their contributions. Some stakeholder programs will perform better than others; the non-performing programs must be evaluated and changed.

Addressing the remaining priorities

The work so far should provide the community with a realistic picture of where it stands in terms of its aspirations and capacity. A rigorous process would lead to realistic outcomes in terms of the unique circumstances for the administration, economics and environment of that particular community. The community will

be heartened by its success, while those members who had not initially participated in the process will be encouraged to join because of the evident achievements.

The beneficiaries and stakeholders will soon realise that despite the range of intervention activities available, it may not be possible to implement all of them. Some may not be a good fit with the community's capabilities, while others may not be possible within an inflexible policy or funding framework. A range of factors may limit whether implementing a particular activity is possible in the community, for instance, policy barriers and funding restrictions. Funding may limit the number of activities able to be implemented and prioritisation will have to occur, with consideration given to the cost-effectiveness of activities. In some cases alternative strategies will need to be explored.

In analysing alternative strategies, the beneficiaries and stakeholders will be faced with competing interests that need some fairly robust discussions for a decision. Some of the competing interests may be community versus community, others may be plan versus bureaucracy. For the sake of objectivity (and to minimise arguments), the group could develop a set of criteria and a scoring system that allocates points to each strategy to differentiate those strategies which stand out from the others.

Full implementation (and what the new approach looks like)

After everything that has gone into the initiative up to this point, full implementation should more or less work according to plan. If the strategy is working, then refinements will occur as a result of the planned mechanisms for learning, monitoring and evaluation. There will be glitches but when things go wrong, they should be handled in a manner similar to standard project management contingency. However, the lessons from making mistakes should not be overlooked.

Participation

The stakeholders must now be involved according to the plan for each activity. At this point, everybody involved should accept that the process being adopted is a community-focused, collaborative effort. Now would not be an appropriate time for the government to take over and do everything for the community. During implementation, it is important the community does as much work as possible instead of the government bringing in consultants. Granted, technical development practitioners are necessary; however, the community must be genuine participants in the implementation. The principle is for the community to decide, and it may decide that it needs support. Proposals by the community must be considered and debated as a group allowing for informed decision-making.

Delivery

There are a number of key characteristics of the delivery stage. It is activity specific, and all tasks must contribute to meeting an objective identified during the planning process. It is also labour intensive as there must be genuine community engagement in a manner consistent with the community dynamics. The implementation must be facilitated by a person or persons with technical proficiency and monitored by an involved community. The achievements of the activity should be publicised so all involved are informed and the process and its results are transparent.

Learning

Individuals must be held accountable. If someone is unable to deliver, that person must be assisted to deliver better outcomes. Service delivery agencies must be held accountable for the development initiative: there should be no funding unless an activity has been logically set out as addressing a community need, agreed to by the community, and described in a social agreement; they must also be held accountable in the mainstream sense of good governance and value for money.

In some instances, the government paradigm may need to be changed. During implementation, many government representatives will see that community development is not something government does *to* communities, nor is it something government does *for* communities—it is something government does *with* communities. Preferably, communities should do it themselves with government support. Past practice has the community as the object of programs and not (as this paper argues) as the 'subject.' In many cases, government agencies will have to adopt a hands-off approach so that their role is mainly to support the work being done by the community.

When to walk away

When the process has stalled and remedial efforts have not worked, it is time for the government to 'walk away.' When there is no prospect of a future relationship, it is a reasonably clear sign that the approach was flawed or that one of the partners had an ulterior motive or that the policies were inappropriate for the particular community. Although withdrawal has dire implications for future funding or service delivery to the affected community or region, the government is entitled to expect a reasonable return for its effort. The community can also take a similar decision as it also contributes resources to the initiative. Importantly, there must be maturity in the relationship between the community and stakeholders and a high level of trust that enables discussion.

In the event the activity has not achieved meaningful community participation, any funding or service provision to that group or community will at best only ever be putting out spot-fires instead of building firebreaks. The activity being implemented will not be sustainable because it is owned by select stakeholders (probably government) and not by the community.

If the developmental approach has not worked, then future funding cannot be expected to seriously address disadvantage. Of course, funding may be continued for political reasons, but it is no more than appeasement or welfare by another name.

Where the developmental methodology is not continued, the community would be free to continue in its own right without government assistance. The development process will provide the community with absolute clarity as to its prospects of sustainability without government support. Funding or support for the community may be sought from philanthropic organisations or, alternatively, the community or region may benefit from engaging with industry stakeholders.

Threats to the process

Policy and ideology

Not all communities are sustainable. It is dangerous to assume that just because a community exists now that it will always exist. A community can secure a sustainable future only when it is able to exist in a two-way economic exchange built on the same or similar social contract as other Australians. In a welfare society, people struggle to find purpose, which leads to disengagement and more serious problems. The problem is that successive governments have for decades endorsed unrequited Indigenous welfare in spite of the resultant personal and societal destruction. However, support for welfare may be difficult to fend off. It is a threat to the development process where ideology (or politics) usurps logic and a community is falsely maintained even though the most likely outcome is a toxic, dysfunctional community.

Philosophical barriers

Although it is counter-intuitive, there will be philosophical barriers to overcoming disadvantage and developing sustainable communities. Philosophical agendas are maintained by various organisations and personalities.

One such barrier is the philosophical argument that 'we are here now and so must be funded in perpetuity.' This argument ceases to be valid when there is societal breakdown. No community should be funded when it cannot guarantee providing its residents with

the minimum standards of safety, education and civic services. Such communities should be helped to develop their capacity. However, the extent of assistance should be based on a corresponding commitment from the community.

Another barrier is the attitude of 'we must remain here to maintain our culture.' Again, this argument is substantially weakened by the loss of culture inflicted by disengagement and loss of purpose, which in turn often leads to substance abuse, violence, incarceration, and ultimately, loss of culture.

What if the bureaucracy gets in the way

The risk is that process participants are not equity partners in the journey. The intended beneficiaries must be in a position to raise their concerns with stakeholder partners and their performance. Attaining this level of equity and trust is important; without it, the identification, design and implementation of a community initiative will be sub-standard.

What if the community contribution falls short

The international experience is that a community development project will have little, if any, prospect of sustainability unless the beneficiary community makes a meaningful contribution either through funding or in kind.[8]

Some contributions will be financial, for instance, the equivalent of paying rates or rent and shopping locally. Other contributions will be behavioural, for instance, sending children to school and observing agreed protocols such as limiting alcohol consumption or illicit drug use. The beneficiaries' commitment to change should rightly be seen as a major contribution.

Over time, changed behaviour will reinforce the concept of cause and effect; for instance, destruction of a piece of public property results in the loss of public amenities, while the funds being spent on avoidable repairs could have been put to better use. Often, not everybody wants to change behaviour, so during the planning phase

the community should have assessed the consequences of not being able to operate on the same social contract as other Australians. This must not be a conversation just about rights or culture but also about basic human living conditions and the future prospects of the community. The conversation must be about the implications of change for individuals, families and organisations, including government and associated services.

Contingency for the community contribution falling short is not a punitive arrangement. The implementation strategy would have clearly set out the contributions or behaviours expected of the community and the response if the community contribution falls short. The options available to the stakeholders providing funding and support to deal with such a situation would have been decided well in advance and in full collaboration with the community. This reinforces the importance of the social agreement and the manner in which it is developed and honoured.

The first and obvious option is for the stakeholders to work with the beneficiaries to revisit the plan (see below). The second option is to put the process on hold, with the stakeholders continuing to monitor community sentiment over time. The process may resume with new appointments, either within the government or the community. Another option is to withdraw altogether or 'walk away'—this option is appropriate only if other corrective steps have not worked.

When to revisit the plan and change something

A good plan will provide for amendments. Perhaps the community overestimated its capacity; perhaps the community didn't fully appreciate the effects of change; perhaps unforeseen changes occurred within the community such as key people leaving; perhaps changes in government policy increased the difficulties in the community engagement process; or perhaps there is resistance to a new type of community where reciprocity and obligation are expected of the community culture instead of 'easy money.' It is also possible that government behaviour may jeopardise the plan.

If the plan isn't working, it must be revisited with a view to making adjustments. Monitoring will provide the information to decide this. Within limits, the plan may be changed by stakeholders and beneficiaries in partnership; however, the revised plan must retain sufficient procedural rigour to still deliver the community's higher order goals established in the initial process. It is simply unreasonable for the community to expect to minimise or avoid its commitment while still attracting the benefits of publicly funded support. Similarly, it is unreasonable for government agencies to expect the community process to continue to operate if organisational relationships change to the detriment of the initiative.

The important thing is to start small and go bigger with experience. This is why it is essential to get the underlying principles right in the first instance so that the beneficiaries and stakeholders are better equipped to react to practical or administrative impediments. The capacity of the community will be enhanced over time using this approach. Similarly, the service providers (as stakeholders) will achieve a greater understanding of what works and what doesn't in communities.

If it is not working even after changes

The reality is that some remote Indigenous communities are sustainable while others are not. There is no simple or empirical measurement to be applied to rule a community in or out, sustainable or unsustainable. Instead, the actions of the community decide whether a community can over time ensure a thriving, safe and healthy population.

We are not suggesting that any particular community, or category of community, ought to be shut down. Rather, exhaustive effort is required for the community to assess its own situation and options and decide whether it is capable of and prepared to make the necessary improvements. This would result in the community understanding its situation and deciding to 'shut down' within a logical and technically sound methodology. There will be instances where the hoped for improvements won't occur. Not every plan will work as

originally intended, and some plans will fail even with refinement; however, people (intended beneficiaries and stakeholders) will learn from the attempt.

Let's imagine that a community activity was developed and implemented faithfully according to sound methodology and enjoyed strong support from stakeholders. The problems were explored, goals were set, and actions and responsibilities were allocated. Despite this, the plan struggled, and so it was refined within agreed limits, after which the revised plan was given ample opportunity to work. However, the community leaders were either unable or unwilling to meet the agreed minimum standards of a safe community with civic services. At this point, it is reasonable for government agencies to question the appropriateness of continuing investment in this community. In continuing to fund a community without the prospect of agreed improvements, government is wasting resources that could be better spent elsewhere; creating a debt that will be incurred by another agency at a later stage; and directly financing community dysfunction.

At this point, it may be reasonable to leave the community to its own devices but with government agencies retaining a keen interest to ensure rule of law and minimum standards for safety, health and education. As harsh as this may seem, the shocking images in so many communities is testament to the need for dissonant change.

An option for a community operating on its own devices is industry engagement whereby the community attracts some sort of income stream through business or a land use compensation package. Although this option is a technical possibility, if available to a community it is likely that it would already have been exploited at an earlier stage.

Another option is for a community to rely on philanthropy. But this is not a prudent long-term course of action, as it is unlikely to deliver meaningful changes to the lives of its residents, and will most likely maintain the community residents on a path of dependency.

The community and stakeholders would question their achievements in this situation. Importantly, the partners to the

initiative (intended beneficiaries and stakeholders) would come together to explore other available options. Then again, a decision would be made together. Even if the decision is the status quo, the community would have been strengthened through the initiative in enabling decision-making with responsibility.

It is not about more money

An effective and sustainable process is immediately available to overcome disadvantage in Indigenous communities. It is based on a logical approach from decades of international experience in supporting the strengthening of communities. There are no set outcomes; rather, the needs of the community are identified by the intended community beneficiaries. It is irresponsible, both socially and financially, to avoid analysis and go straight to a solution invented in the capital city or to address only one component of disadvantage. It is absolute folly to assume that every community needs more doctors, more police, and more houses.

There seems to be a mantra from various peak bodies that more money is the only answer to the woes of Indigenous communities. Although the logic behind this is unclear, it provides any petitioner with a convenient way to shift blame and thereby delay or even avoid action.

There are many Aboriginal programs and corporations around the country that genuinely ought to have more funds for the delivery of effective services. At the same time, there are many more programs and corporations delivering unnecessary or inefficient services. It would seem logical to reallocate funds according to needs that have been determined through a rigorous process. The needs may be holistic from a community perspective requiring a whole-of-government approach.

The process described in this paper outlines a way in which funding can be allocated according to needs identified by the intended beneficiaries and agreed to by all stakeholders, and then met through a practical course of action (or activities).

If the government is not spending money in a technically sustainable manner, then that money is only welfare by another name—and welfare is not sustainable. Even if a government is prepared to keep pouring good money after bad, which successive governments have been doing for decades, there is no trigger for communities to take responsibility and be a part of the solution. Spending vast sums of money cannot ensure appalling conditions in Indigenous communities will change for the better.

Endnotes

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Sustainability of Indigenous Communities

Social indicators of Indigenous disadvantage prove that the orthodox methods of delivering services to Indigenous people have not worked. The failure of these methods is also indicated by the proliferation of approaches trying to work around established orthodoxies. This paper sets out an alternative process, based on successful developmental methodologies used extensively around the world, by which Indigenous communities could work with their stakeholders to overcome disadvantage. Dissonant change is necessary to break out of the failed orthodoxy of grant funding by departmental silos, which in many cases are dysfunctional in their own right.

This paper also debunks the myth that it's too hard to make improvements in Indigenous affairs and that it will take a generation for change to occur, and instead, establishes how proven techniques can be used to make changes to service delivery straightaway. The consequent improvements will be measurable, save money, and achieve development change outcomes.

A dysfunctional community that is provided with relevant technical assistance and support will be able to develop and implement its own strategy for sustainable improvement. However, the chances of success for any community development intervention depend on two factors: first, the community's will for change and the political will at the highest level of government (namely, the one that provides funds to subordinate program administrators), and second, the genuine participation of the intended beneficiaries and stakeholders in the change process.

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