



Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
The Australian National University

Education, Training and Indigenous Futures
CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007

Research Summaries

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Reference No. 4

Summarising: Altman (2001), *Sustainable development options on Aboriginal land: The hybrid economy in the twenty-first century*

Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990-2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

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Title of Research:

Sustainable development options on Aboriginal land: The hybrid economy in the twenty-first century

Research Publication:

CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 226/2001

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2001_DP226.pdf>

Name of Researcher(s):

J.C. Altman

Time period:

2001

Geographic location:

The remote area of central Arnhem Land, with application to other remote areas of Australia

Methodology:

The paper is a theoretical paper drawing upon research on the customary economy undertaken by the researcher in remote central Arnhem Land since 1971.

Aims:

The purpose of the paper is exploratory as it:

- Outlines the economic development challenges facing Indigenous people living in remote and regional Australia;
- Describes the nature of the economy in which many of these people are living; and
- Suggests future development options.

Selected findings and insights:

The paper describes the **economic development** problem for remote communities in terms of low income—with heavy dependence on the state as the primary source of income due to a general lack of commercially viable enterprises in remote localities. Factors impacting upon the economic development problems faced by Indigenous peoples in remote areas are briefly identified, some factors being historical, others being culturally based and still others being more related to governance issues. This is within the context of an expected increase in the size of the remote Indigenous population.

The **hybrid economy** operating in remote communities comprises three sectors:

- The market—which is the private or commercial sector and which generally is very small in terms of production and hence small in terms of source of income for the community. For example the retail sector, arts industry, commercial wildlife harvesting and tourism activity might provide the basis for market activity.
- The state—which is a major service provider in terms of infrastructure and welfare support. As such it is the major source of income for the community.

- The customary economy—which comprises productive activities associated with cultural continuities: hunting, gathering and fishing as well as land and habitat management and the maintenance of biodiversity. Whilst this sector is not a direct source of income, it does have significant economic value, especially in the tropical savannahs and wetlands.

The three sectors of the hybrid economy are interlinked rather than acting totally independently. For example, CDEP or equivalent program (provided by the state) may generate income through supporting an arts or wildlife harvesting commercial enterprise (the market) and also helping maintain traditional art or hunting and gathering techniques (customary).

The paper argues that with a **leveling off of the state sector** of the economy, the key development issue is how to expand the productive market and customary sectors, noting that:

- Many members of Indigenous communities may not wish to directly engage with the wider economy if it results in greater interaction with people outside their traditional community;
- The benefits of the customary economy to both Indigenous communities and the wider Australian community are generally not well recognised;
- The need for strengthened governance structures, itself dependent upon capacity building and stronger institutions; and
- At least in the short term, there may well be greater reliance upon non-Indigenous expertise if there is to be increased and successful interaction with the market.

The importance of **combining the expertise** of scientists, social scientists and Indigenous stakeholders in sustainable economic developments for the market is highlighted with examples drawn from the arts industry (the Maningrida Arts and Culture) and wildlife management (the Bawinanga Sustainable Use Project).

The paper concludes by calling for:

- Increased understanding of the hybrid economy and its relationship to Indigenous values;
- Greater recognition of the customary contributions provided by Indigenous people which benefit to the nation as a whole and hence should generate a proper source of income; and
- Indigenous interests to be prepared to quickly harness market opportunities as they arise in remote areas as their frequency is rare.

Educational implications:

This paper provides background on the types of labour markets operating in remote regions for those educational and training institutions responsible for developing pathways to employment. It emphasises the need for training providers (and schools through *VET in Schools* programs, for example) to develop training programs and packages that:

- Bring together skills necessary to underpin a commercial enterprise such as an arts industry; and
- Facilitate the continuing development of customary skills as an essential part of a student's learning.

This calls for quite different forms of training delivery and closer collaboration of education and training institutions with local Indigenous organisations. **[training]**

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

The challenge for pathways to training, employment and higher education

Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers:

J.C. Altman and M. Cochrane, 'Innovative institutional design for sustainable wildlife management in the Indigenous-owned savanna', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 247*, 2003.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2003_DP247.pdf>