



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. 6

Summarising: Altman (2001), *Indigenous Communities and Business: Three perspectives, 1998-2000*

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.

The MCEETYA report and associated research summaries are available at <www.anu.edu.au/caepr/education.php>.

Title of Research:

Indigenous Communities and Business: Three perspectives, 1998-2000

Research Publication:

CAEPR Working Paper No. 9, 2001

<<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/WP/CAEPRWP09.pdf>>

Name of Researcher(s):

J.C. Altman

Time period:

1998-2000

Geographic location:

Remote regions of Australia

Methodology:

This paper is an amalgamation of three shorter papers presented at various conferences and forums addressing Indigenous economic development. The papers are broadly based on statistical analysis of economic indicators, and reviews of recent CAEPR research and government policy.

Aims:

The three papers that constitute this research have slightly different aims, but they fall generally into the following:

- To explore how the need to address Indigenous disadvantage articulates with government policy to encourage greater economic development and involvement in private-sector business partnerships
- To ask more clearly what is meant by 'economic development' in Indigenous contexts
- To indicate, based on evidence of successes and failures in the Indigenous economic sphere, the current limitations upon such development.

Selected findings and insights:

This summary paper provides a good basis for examining the role of Indigenous business enterprises in assisting Indigenous economic development especially in remote regions.

The paper notes that economic development in contemporary policy discourse tends to infer an increase in employment opportunities, higher incomes and less dependence upon government.

- Indigenous Australians continue to have very circumscribed economic opportunities, based upon locational disadvantage, resource constraints, along with low levels of health and education.
- These historically constituted constraints continue to militate against successful partnerships, integration and articulation with commercial enterprise.
- Economic development, therefore, cannot be delivered without development in education, training, housing and health.

Inhibitors to successful business enterprises include targeting program support at the community (where commercial enterprise is rarely successful) rather than at the individual level, and not recognising the fundamental need for:

- Business advisory services and the need to constantly mentor Indigenous business during a potentially prolonged establishment phase.

In regard to agreements made between industry and Indigenous communities for enterprise development, greater attention needs to be paid to the post-agreement phase, including implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review. Whilst this may be largely a responsibility of industry, Indigenous communities also require **sufficiently robust corporate or governance structures** to ensure industry obligations are being met as well as their own responsibilities are being undertaken.

The paper identifies several other inhibitors: a shortage of technical and management skills to underpin business enterprises and limited available markets, where often there is no strong consumer base.

- Culturally oriented businesses offer a competitive advantage and most scope for development, covering areas such as arts and crafts and cultural tourism. [Although since then greater attention has also been given to wildlife, land and sea management as potential Indigenous enterprises].

Educational implications:

Until such time as Indigenous people are able to engage with autonomy and confidence in business enterprise, such enterprise is unlikely to deliver (to Indigenous people) the kinds of benefits anticipated by government policies. Any policy underpinning economic development, therefore, will require coordinated policy shifts in the areas of education and training, among others. **[business enterprise development]**

The areas of greatest potential in remote and very remote regions remain in the arts and craft industries and the tourism industries. Education and training strategies will be required to underpin the establishment of small businesses in each of these areas, especially in regard to business management, business planning and financial management skills. **[pathways] [curriculum]**

Training courses of themselves are likely to be insufficient. An essential component of a well developed training strategy for enterprise development suggested by this research is the instigation of mentoring and follow-up training to assist enterprises in their early stages of development. **[mentoring]**

Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

The challenge for pathways to training, employment and higher education

Access to employment

Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers:

J.C. Altman and J. Finlayson, 'Aborigines, tourism and sustainable development', *CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 26*, 1992.

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/1992_DP26.pdf>