



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. 41

Summarising: Dodson & Smith, (2003), *Governance for sustainable development: Strategic issues and principles for Indigenous Australian communities*

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:

Governance for sustainable development: Strategic issues and principles for Indigenous Australian communities.

Research Publication:

CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 250/2003

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/DP/2003_DP250.pdf>

Name of Researcher(s):

M. Dodson and D.E. Smith

Time period:

2001

Geographic location:

National, with particular application to Indigenous communities.

Methodology:

This is a discussion paper drawing upon existing Australian and international research literature and the extensive field experience of the researchers.

Aims:

This paper examines the concepts of 'governance', 'good governance' and 'sustainable development' in the context of Australian Indigenous communities and regions.

- A particular aim of the paper is to explore the link between governance and sustainable development.

Selected findings and insights:

This paper defines governance in terms of the processes, structures and institutions (formal and informal) through which a group, community or society makes decisions, distributes and exercises authority and power, determines strategic goals, organises corporate, group and individual behaviour, develops rules and assigns responsibility.

Current **external barriers** to sustainable development identified by the researchers include:

- Highly variable (or no) property and resource rights;
- Lack of financial capital and credit; access to markets, high transport costs, small populations and low economies of scale; and
- Poor coordination of service delivery among government agencies.

These external barriers interact with **community-level** factors such as:

- Lack of human capital, especially in regard to financial management and business skills, low levels of financial literacy and literacy in general; and health and lifestyle problems which impact upon Indigenous social and cultural capital;

- Governing structures, processes and institutions which may be highly duplicated and overly reliant upon non-Indigenous people; and
- Indigenous culture and the customary economy, which may influence the extent to which the community interacts with mainstream economic opportunities.

The paper argues that it is important for Indigenous communities to focus upon those keys to sustainable development for which they have a **high degree of control**. These are:

- Governing structures, processes and institutions; and
- Local development policies and strategies.

In contrast, the researchers argue the limited short-term pay-off for communities investing heavily in issues such as **education and training** due to structural, funding and health obstacles – these are more likely to yield longer-term outcomes.

While there is no single model of good governance for Indigenous communities, the paper identifies and describes **key principles underpinning good governance** which need to be considered:

- Stable and broadly representative structures, capable and effective institutions, sound corporate governance as legally required;
- Limitation and separation of powers;
- Fair and reliable dispute resolution mechanisms and appeal processes;
- Effective financial management and administrative systems;
- Simple and locally relevant information management systems; and
- Effective development policies and realistic strategies.

One of the most important principles for good governance identified in the paper is the need to ensure a **cultural 'match' or 'fit'** which addresses the issue of legitimacy and mandate and take account of local culturally-based values and practices. The paper points out that:

- A cultural match is more about developing strategic and realistic connections between extant cultural values and standards, and those required by the world of business and administration....but the governing arrangements must also have to work within the contemporary environment.

Educational implications:

This article assists non-Indigenous school principals and teaching staff to understand the dynamics of Indigenous communities, especially their social and governance networks. This would be a prior condition for negotiating educational partnership agreements with Indigenous communities. [culture]

Good Indigenous governance can be combined with good school governance to produce an overall effective form of school and community educational partnership arrangement which recognises and works within cultural difference. Of particular importance for school representatives is recognising different negotiation styles, different forms of representation and consultation and different approaches to accountability that characterise much of Indigenous governance. For example, Indigenous representation finds itself accountable 'two-ways' - to its Indigenous community and to government whereas a school will be primarily accountable to government. [educational partnership agreements]

Relevance:

Introductory Topic: Culture, Community and Family Life

Domain 2 - School and Community Educational Partnerships

Complexity and diversity of communities

Use and negotiation of educational partnership agreements between schools and communities

Related papers:

J. Hunt and D.E. Smith, 'Further key insights from the Indigenous Community Governance Project', 2006

<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Projects/Key_Insights_ICGP_2006.pdf>

J. Hunt and D.E. Smith, 'The Indigenous Community Governance Project (ICGP) ICGP Project Summary', 2005

<<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Projects/10keymessages.pdf>>.