Australian National University

NORTH AUSTRALIA RESEARCH UNIT

DISCUSSION PAPER

SUSTAINING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLANNING: CASE STUDIES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL APPROACHES

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UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
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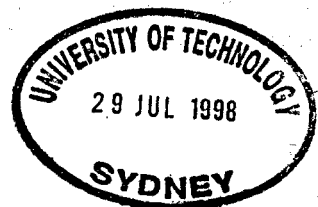
NORTH AUSTRALIA RESEARCH UNIT

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The Unit's academic work is interdisciplinary and principally in the social sciences. An overall aim is to initiate research on problems of development in the north, little studied by other institutions. At present, emphasis is being given to four main research areas:

- Environmental management and planning
- Governance and policymaking structures
- Economic development and social equity
- Quality of community life.

The future prospects and present needs of the Aboriginal and Islander communities remain a major theme in our work as are ecological and economic sustainability.

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We hope that this series will open up discussion about some issues of northern development and the inevitable conflicts that arise from change, culture contacts and diversity of values.

Information about the Unit's activities and publications can be obtained from:

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Disclaimer

The views expressed by the author are not necessarily the views of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

Notes on contributor

Jackie Wolfe is a geographer and Associate Professor in the University School of Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada (1967 – present). She has worked in community planning and development with Indian and Inuit groups in Canada. Since 1986 she has spent several months each year as a Visiting Fellow at NARU, researching and writing on Aboriginal community government, conditions in town-camps, and, for the last four years, on Aboriginal community and regional development planning.

ABSTRACT

Aboriginal people are acutely aware of the extent to which their lives are directed, planned for, and, in many significant ways controlled by external agencies and individuals. Consequently Aboriginal communities and organisations around Australia are seeking ways to ensure that Aboriginal people have an effective say in the decisions which affect their everyday lives and their future. A few Aboriginal communities and organisations and some planning and training institutions are tapping into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission community planning program and using ATSIC and other government funding sources to create their own approaches to community development planning. Many Aboriginal organisations have been developing their own capacity to plan: in part because external agencies are requiring formal plans, and in part because they have discovered for themselves the advantage of careful organisation planning.

Institutions, such as the Northern Territory Open College in Alice Springs, the Community Management Training Unit of South Australia DETAFE, and the West Kimberley Community Development Units, offer planning support and plans production services to Aboriginal communities. NTOC Alice Springs and the West Kimberley CDUs have sought to combine their community planning service with planning training. All three have been exploring ways to accomplish Aboriginal community development planning more effectively. All three embrace the concept of empowering or re-empowering Aboriginal communities through increasing their capacity to effectively undertake planning for themselves. The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to examine the ways that these non-governmental organisations are approaching Aboriginal community development planning, and to highlight commonalities and differences, strengths and problems arising.

The NTOC Community Development Planning team and the West Kimberley CDUs, in particular, represent the emergence of organisations which recognise that conventional planning models and processes are not

necessarily consistent or compatible with Aboriginal needs and processes, and are committed to working towards development of Aboriginal models and processes. They promote identification and implementation, by Aboriginal people, of Aboriginal models of planning, and Aboriginal models of appropriate process and purpose. The West Kimberley CDUs illustrate a further step: emergence of community development planning organisations which are Aboriginal staffed, managed and controlled, and which link the doing of developmental planning with on the job experiential training of community members and of staff.

In this they are part of a process which is gathering momentum in Canada (Taylor-Henley and Hudson 1992), New Zealand (Fleras 1989), and Australia (Rowse 1992; Coombs 1993), whereby Aboriginal people not only administer and deliver services to their communities on behalf of government agencies: they control and shape services by exercising decision-making authority through their own organisations. Such Aboriginal planning and training organisations represent an important step in the direction of greater Aboriginal autonomy, empowerment and self-government.

SUSTAINING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLANNING: CASE STUDIES OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL APPROACHES

Jackie Wolfe

Cascade and drowning effect

Aboriginal people are acutely aware of the extent to which their lives are directed, planned for, and, in many significant ways controlled by external forces. For example, each government agency has its own programs and priorities. High financial inputs into community infrastructure, housing, and other physical and social services occur, often with little inter-agency coordination, little consideration of the community's own priorities, and little appreciation of what is and is not culturally appropriate.

Furthermore, both State and Commonwealth government departments advocate tying financial assistance to communities and organisations to the existence of a community or organisation plan, for training, for housing, for economic development, or for community infrastructure. This can have the effect of increasing rather than decreasing government and agency control by making communities and organisations accountable to the agency for expenditures within tight program guide-lines and approved community plans.

This situation has been exacerbated by two other trends, which together are producing what may be called a cascade and drowning effect. In recent years government departments have increasingly devolved responsibilities from the centre to the regions, from the regions to the

districts and from the district level to communities. Some observers suggest that there is a tendency for bureaucracies to devolve most readily those matters which they find particularly difficult to deal with (Quarles van Ufford 1988). Devolution of Aboriginal affairs has tended to occur without the supports which communities themselves have been telling government are necessary and appropriate, such as community development and planning assistance, and related training.

Simultaneously, communities have themselves demanded a stronger voice in decision-making. They have sought greater involvement in, and responsibility for matters which most concern them, and have embraced the notion of participation, consultation, and, the latest term, negotiation (Dale 1990, 3). Government agencies have also embraced the policy, and, in many cases the practice, of increased public consultation. In Aboriginal matters, this has translated into visits to communities by government agency staff, and meetings with community council members, and, with increasing frequency, with the community at large.

The trickle-down of responsibilities being passed from higher levels to communities has become a cascade, as both Commonwealth and State departments off-load. At the same time, departments expect that consultation (or negotiation) will continue to take place around those matters which have been devolved, just as it does around those that have not. The structures for government in most Aboriginal communities were not created for the purposes now being devolved. Furthermore, devolution has not been accompanied by careful, culturally appropriate institutional development. Community leaders and administrators are poorly trained and inadequately equipped to deal with the array of demands being placed on them.

Aboriginal communities are drowning under the burden of increased activity, responsibility, and expectations for community participation as a consequence of well-intentioned, though often poorly thought out devolution.

Pilot model failed

Federal agency promotion of community planning

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) attempted, through several community development planning pilot projects (in the East Kimberley, Northern Territory, northern Queensland, Lightning Ridge, NSW, and Point Pearce, South Australia), to develop a model for planning delivery to Aboriginal communities. The model, which required that DEET and ATSIC field staff cooperatively provide a community development planning service, was not particularly successful. There was, for example, a lack of understanding of, and commitment to community development planning within the lead agencies. The agencies did not give serious consideration to how they could support the community planning activity, beyond requiring some activities on the part of a few field staff. Nor had they considered carefully how they themselves would respond to and use the community plans (Wolfe 1993a).

The ATSIC community development planning program, initiated in mid-1991, provides funds for the preparation of community plans. Many communities and organisations hire consultants to prepare plans. Community input into the plan is becoming the norm, rather than the exception. Nevertheless, the current program falls short of meeting goals of increasing the capacity of communities and organisations to plan more effectively, in large part because it has not found an effective way of incorporating education and training components, or of providing planning support on a long-term basis (Wolfe 1993b).

Furthermore, there continues to be an unresolved tension within government agencies as to the purpose of community planning. One persistent view regards it as contributing to more efficient provision of physical and (to a lesser extent) social services, and as a source of community-level information which government agencies can use when setting their priorities and making funding allocation decisions. The other view regards it as a way of increasing the capacity of a community to

social, physical services create tension in gov agencies.

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> have an effective say in the decisions which most affect it. The ability to develop and implement a community strategic and action plan can, it is argued, be a tool of Aboriginal empowerment and re-empowerment.

Increasing the power to decide: an introduction to community-based development planning

Aboriginal organisations and communities have identified community development planning, on their own terms and carried out their own way, as a means to re-establish some control of this increasingly complex and overwhelming agenda. To paraphrase this perspective: 'when we don't do it for ourselves, others are only too ready to do it for us' (see Dale 1990, 1, quoting Mick Miller of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy Task Force).

Aboriginal communities and organisations around Australia are, therefore, seeking ways to ensure that Aboriginal people have an effective say in the decisions which affect their everyday lives and their future. For example, when the Kimberley Land Council sought to be the coordinating body for Aboriginal development planning in the East Kimberley the central purpose of its proposal was 'having the power to decide' (Kimberley Land Council 1992a). The Kimberley Land Council believes that community development planning can make an important contribution to the empowerment of Aboriginal people. It also insists that land, and control over land, is a central concern for Aboriginal people (Kimberley Land Council 1992b).

Many Aboriginal organisations have been developing their own capacity to plan, partly out of an external necessity to access funding, and partly because they have discovered for themselves the advantage of careful organisation planning. Special purpose Aboriginal organisations, like Julalikari Aboriginal Resource Corporation in Tennant Creek, are using planning to become more effective providers of housing, and legal, health and other services (Wolfe 1993b, 23).

Planning working

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A number of educational institutions, both Aboriginal and largely non-Aboriginal, are now providing community administration and management education and training, with a more or less explicit community development planning component. Examples include Tranby Aboriginal Co-operative College, NSW (Tranby Aboriginal College 1992); the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University of Technology, Perth (Stringer 1991); Batchelor College, Northern Territory; the Aboriginal Task Force at the South Australia Institute of Technology; and Department of Employment, Vocational Education, Training and Industrial Relations, Queensland. The certificate and diploma programs are targeted to training Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as community development officers to work within their home communities or organisations, and to be resource people for Aboriginal development planning more generally. Most are targeted at Aboriginal community leaders and administrative staff. Several, like the Curtin program, combine periods of classroom education with on-the-job experiential training.

Some planning and training institutions and a few Aboriginal communities and organisations are using ATSIC and other government funding sources to create their own approaches to community development planning.

Exploring ways to sustain Aboriginal community development planning

> Currently there is no facility at government, resource agency or community level devoted to and capable of undertaking quality planning and development work (West Kimberley Resources Agencies 1990, 3).

Institutions, such as the Northern Territory Open College (NTOC) in Alice Springs, the Community Management Training Unit of South Australian Department of Employment and Technical and Further Education, and the West Kimberley Community Development Units

(CDUs), now offer planning support and plans production services to Aboriginal communities. NTOC Alice Springs and the West Kimberley CDUs have sought to combine their community planning service with planning training.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to examine the ways that non-governmental organisations are approaching Aboriginal community development planning, and to highlight commonalities and differences, strengths and problems arising. The paper looks at three rather different institutions which have been providing planning support and training to Aboriginal communities and organisations: the Community Management Training Unit (CMTU) of the South Australia DETAFE college system; the Community Development Planning (CDP) program of the Northern Territory Open College of Technical and Further Education in Alice Springs; and the Community Development Units (CDUs) associated with three Aboriginal support Resource Centres in the West Kimberley area of Western Australia.

A recent paper examining the delivery of services in Aboriginal communities in Canada identifies four models of the relationship between Aboriginal communities and upper tier government: assimilation, integration, delegation, and autonomy (Taylor-Henley and Hudson 1992) according to the decision-making authority held by each party. In the assimilationist model governments exercise full and complete decision-making authority and use existing mechanisms to deliver services. In the integration model governments establish community advisory structures and continue to use existing delivery agencies. Delegation occurs when governments hand over some responsibility to Aboriginal communities for the delivery of services, and also begin to delegate some authority for decision-making to formally constituted community organisations. This, according to Taylor-Henley and Hudson, begins to open up exciting possibilities for greater Aboriginal decision-making about the public services Aboriginal communities receive. The fourth model, autonomy, remains elusive and exceptional. In it, Aboriginal organisations exercise full authority over

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service delivery as but one component of Aboriginal self-government (Wolfe 1989). Using rather different terminology, Rowse (1992) critiques government-Aboriginal relations in Australia, and draws similar conclusions.

The three organisations examined in this paper have been exploring ways to accomplish Aboriginal community development planning more effectively. All three embrace the concept of empowering Aboriginal communities through increasing their capacity to effectively make planning decisions for themselves. The paper explores **how** they operationalise the concept, and reflects on where they are positioned with respect to models of Aboriginal-government decision-making authority.

Community development planning through an established education and training institution: Community Management Training Units of the South Australia DETAFE

Origins

In late 1989 a conference organised by the Department of Employment Education and Training for representatives of Aboriginal organisations and communities in South Australia resolved that community development planning was a priority, and that some means should be found to combine community plan making with community planning training. The Adelaide ATSIC regional manager, for one, was convinced that neither ATSIC nor DEET field staff had the time or skills needed, and that community planning could only be carried out by well trained specialists.

In South Australia, the School of Aboriginal Education of the Technical and Further Education college system houses a State-wide Community Management Training Unit, which has been contracted since 1990 to

provide a community development planning and training service to interested Aboriginal communities and organisations across the State.

CMTU staff members, numbering about eight, are attached to different TAFE colleges around South Australia. The unit has a director, responsible for dealing with the college administration on behalf of the CMTU. Staff members come together several times a year for mutual training and strategy development sessions.

With funding initially from DEET and ATSIC, the CMTU was scheduled to have two community plans completed by June 1990, and twelve by the end of September. Although targets were deemed to have been met, the plans were 'at best embryonic'; that is, most provided some information about the community and indicated some community priorities, but went little further. They did not provide the detailed project proposals which some government agencies had been anticipating. An evaluation of the project argued for a second year, to allow for more staff and community experience with the community planning processes, and to put a training program in place.

CMTU involvement in the DEET-ATSIC community development pilot project

In 1991 the CMTU was contracted by DEET and ATSIC to carry out one of the national Aboriginal community development planning pilot projects, with the Point Pearce Aboriginal community. The Point Pearce mission was established in 1867. Since 1972 the land has been held by the South Australian Aboriginal Lands Trust. The community is administered by a local council. Point Pearce Community Council Inc. has nine elected councillors.

Even with facilitation by experienced professionals, the project began slowly. Despite CMTU staff efforts, there was a low level of community involvement, interest and commitment — some residents seemed alienated from the planning process. Within four months of the start-up of the pilot

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project, CMTU discussed the difficulties and slow progress with DEET and ATSIC regional officers and managers. Agreement was reached that the CMTU should provide Point Pearce Council and community members with an educational awareness program to assist Council in its task of promoting community development planning concepts within the community. The awareness program would, it was hoped, increase community and council understanding of the benefits and the demands of community-based planning, and would develop a closer working relationship between CMTU staff, Council and community members.

The CMTU team continued to work with Point Pearce, and through a combination of awareness raising, data collection, meetings with Council and meetings and workshops with community members and community organisations, developed the components of a simple community plan. The process, and the written document, took far more than a year to complete. Meanwhile, team members also worked with other communities on their community development plans.

When they reported on the Point Pearce pilot, DEET and ATSIC monitors made particular note of the community readiness and planning awareness phase which the CMTU team put in place: a phase in which facilitators work with community leaders, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, key organisations and community members to introduce the notion of community planning, and work to assist the community to put in place internal planning support structures and processes. Nevertheless, the agencies did not take steps to put an awareness or pre-planning phase in place in the other pilot schemes. By 1993, however, ATSIC had produced a brochure outlining the principles and practices of community-based planning, which emphasised that

building awareness of community-based planning and development is a critical first step ... This awareness building stage is the community-based planning seed (ATSIC 1993, 3).

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The CMTU pilot was deemed by DEET and ATSIC to be one of the more successful pilots. The relative success, and the difficulties experienced by agency staff working on other pilots, prompted the ATSIC and DEET central office monitors of the pilot scheme to note that the planning delivery model adopted by the two agencies, in which pairs of field staff were to provide the community planning service for communities, had shortcomings which the CMTU model avoided.

CMTU makes links between regional planning and community planning

The CMTU continues to provide planning services to Aboriginal organisations, communities, and to ATSIC Aboriginal Regional Councils. The CMTU was selected from several candidate planning organisations by Wangka Pulka Regional Council to assist council in the preparation of the regional plan as required by ATSIC legislation.

Wangka Pulka Regional Council covers the reserve community of Kooniba, a number of small groups of Aborigines living in towns such as Port Lincoln and Ceduna (where there are several Aboriginal service organisations and one over-arching organisation), and the Homelands Movement organisation for Aboriginal people presently living in and around Ceduna. The Council has nine members. Most of the major communities and interest groups have someone from the group sitting on Regional Council.

The CMTU staff member held a number of workshops with Council about regional planning. At one of the first workshops, Council discussed and decided on a planning process. Regional Council was particularly concerned that the regional planning be a bottom-up process, and that the regional plan should be based on community-level plans. The CMTU facilitator, accompanied by a Regional Councillor, visited every community and organisation in the region, to identify local issues and priorities. Council made written requests to each community and

organisation for a copy of their written plans. In many cases a more or less formal document was available, or the group was well along in the process of preparing one. At a further three-day workshop the facilitator presented Regional Council with the issues raised, and Council added to the lists, and especially in small group discussion, additional information was added. The facilitator wrote up the material and sent a copy to each councillor. At the next workshop the material was discussed, verified, and in many cases the information was corrected. The facilitator wrote short explanatory statements to accompany each of the major regional issues identified through the meeting and workshop process.

Because of the concern Council had about incorporating community plans into the regional plan, the planning process was slowed down to allow draft plans for Port Lincoln and Ceduna to be completed. Wangka Pulka Regional Council was particularly concerned about how to handle some community plans which lay out a community's aspirations and strategies; for example, for establishment of homelands for presently urban-based people. In some cases the community regards its plan and strategy as confidential to itself, not something to be released to others.

Strengths of the CMTU approach and issues arising

The South Australia CMTU model has a number of important characteristics. It

- is legitimatised by being located within an established educational institution;

- has a staff large enough to have a range of skills;

- effectively employs mutual learning and support methods among staff;

- provides specialist professional service on an on-going basis;

- enables planning to move along at a pace acceptable to the community, rather than at the rapid pace demanded by the agencies planning time frames; and

- affords continuity of approach and personnel.

The CMTU community-level process carefully incorporates broad-based community participation. The CMTU philosophy is supportive of increasing Aboriginal capacity and empowerment. However, unlike the West Kimberley project, it does not include Aboriginal empowerment as an explicit goal. Similarly, while it embraces the notion of training of Aboriginal community members, the CMTU does not carry out a training program for Aboriginal community members or Aboriginal staff, although training activities do occur. In this regard it differs from both the West Kimberley project and the NTOC Community Development Planning program, both of which have developed and carry out programs for education and training Aborigines as community development planners.

CMTU staff do encourage members of their client communities to seek further planning training (Wolfe 1993b, 27). Other education and training institutions in South Australia, such as South Australia TAFE itself, and the Australian Institute of Management, have short-term and certificate and diploma training programs in Aboriginal community management and administration. These have special modules on community and organisation planning (Department of Employment and Technical and Further Education, South Australia 1991). The attempt has been made in these programs to place planning within the context of effective community management.

Though dedicated to promotion of greater Aboriginal control over planning and development, the CMTU, as of late 1992, had not yet recruited Aboriginal staff. The CMTU does not yet work in the most remote parts of South Australia; areas where, as in the Kimberley and central Australia, many Aboriginal community members and a significant proportion of community leaders do not speak standard

English, and are not numerate or literate in English. Nor has it yet come to grips with the notion of developing fully Aboriginal models and processes for planning; that is, models and processes that are fully grounded in Aboriginal culture and concepts as well as Aboriginal socio-economic realities.

Searching for effective links between planning and training: the community development planning program of the Northern Territory Open College

NTOC's community development planning phases

Workshop facilitation

The Northern Territory Open College based in Alice Springs has been implementing a community development planning program with Aboriginal communities in central Australia since 1990 (see Dale 1992 and Dale & Burkett c1992 for detailed descriptions and in-depth evaluations of the NTOC CDP program).

The NTOC approach has undergone several shifts in emphasis over the past five or six years. Its origins can be traced to the community development activities of an NTOC-funded adult educator working in the community of Walungurru (formerly known as Kintore) in 1986–87. Alan Randall, the adult educator, engaged the community in community development workshops focussing on issues of concern to the community, as one way of expanding local leadership and management skills. His workshop approach was soon used in other communities in central Australia.

Randall was transferred to Alice Springs NTOC, to coordinate a community development workshop team. Issue-oriented community workshops were held in several Aboriginal communities in central Australia. The method proved to be useful in engaging a broad spectrum

of community members, and the community leadership, in considering community issues, and beginning to develop ideas about various types of projects to improve the community situation. However, no mechanisms had been developed to follow up on workshop recommendations, either by the community or with funding agencies (Dale and Burkett c1992, 3). Review of the workshop approach concluded that, while they identified many community issues, they were too infrequent to effectively transfer planning or management skills (Nelson 1990).

Community-based planning facilitators

In the next phase (1989–90), resident community development planners were placed in client communities, with support from a coordinator and a research officer based in NTOC's Alice Springs office. Different community development strategies were tried in Yuendumu, Impanpa, and other central desert communities. The community development planning facilitator team expected that it would take up to two years to develop each community's plan.

This approach, too, had its strengths and shortcomings. Team members quickly identified no less than sixteen critical issues (Dale and Burkett c1992, 5–7). Both facilitators and people in the communities were unclear about community development planning terminology, concepts, and expected processes and products. The process required a great deal of time. Dale and Burkett (c1992, 6) advised against what they called 'compressed consultation'. The facilitators found definition of 'community' to be a major problem: should the definition be based on geographic (locational and residential) factors or should they use a definition based on the social factors which are such an important part of traditional Aboriginal life, such as kin groupings, language, and affiliation with 'country' and with dreamings. Facilitators also recognised the need to make a clear connection between community development and community management, and to integrate the two.

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The team experienced severe logistical and personnel problems. NTOC found it hard to recruit and retain people who would live in the field for extended periods. It was almost impossible to provide staff in the field with suitable accommodation in communities where housing of any kind is scarce. Field-based facilitators needed a lot of administrative and professional support, which was difficult to provide, given the small size of the staff and the distances involved.

Alice Springs-based itinerant community development planning team

By 1991 NTOC moved to a new phase in which itinerant community development planning facilitators, based in Alice Springs, worked with participating communities for up to a week at a time, and visited the community each month. They worked in small teams and met regularly to share ideas and develop the planning process (Dale and Burkett c1992, 7). This approach reduced pressure on community accommodation, made it easier for NTOC to recruit and keep staff, and to provide professional and administrative support, and moved plan production forward at a more rapid pace.

The team, which consisted of four full-time field facilitators, a research and evaluation officer, and a program coordinator based in Alice Springs worked in ten remote Aboriginal communities in central Australia. The CDP team carried out an awareness process, in which an introductory letter was sent to communities and was followed up, where the community expressed interest, by a team presentation about the community development planning service. The CDP team made a conscious attempt to use culturally appropriate terms and concepts learned through prior experience during the community workshop phase. The team took particular care in dealing with words which are ambiguous in translation, or which do not have any appropriate translation, such as future, goals, and planning process.

Once a community decided to enter a community development planning process, the CDP team facilitated a series of workshops with the community council, local organisations such as housing associations, special interest groups such as local Aboriginal 'landowners', women, and youth, and with the community at large. From these discussions, recorded on large flip-charts, community goals and priorities, and action projects were identified. The intent of the CDP team was to work with each community to develop plans which the community would use to negotiate with government agencies, and to provide community leaders with some preliminary training in negotiation.

The NTOC CDP team came up with a number of innovative approaches to community development planning, one being the method of writing up the 'plan'. Plans were written up in two versions, a regular book-sized version for use with government agencies and consultants, and a plain language, 'big book' version on oversized paper for the community to use and update. The 'big book' was often kept on display in the community office.

The NTOC team tried to give due attention to community-level process and community control of the process, by

- allowing enough time to prepare communities for getting started on planning, including working with them to identify and decide on who needed to do what;

- encouraging and facilitating community-wide discussion of the implications of a particular new future direction, or of initiating new projects;

- facilitating community-wide identification and consideration of both immediate and long term priorities;

- encouraging and supporting community identification of what people could do for themselves, as well as identifying projects which required external action;

- using processes which directly involved people in doing planning, thereby increasing skills and capacity at the community level; and

- endeavouring to ensure that the community, not the NTOC community development planning team or government agencies, had control over the pace, purpose, and direction of the planning process.

NTOC formalises Aboriginal community development planning training

The NTOC team soon recognised that community ability to undertake even part of the formal community development planning process was still very limited, and that community leaders and members were still not gaining much in the way of planning and facilitation skills. This recognition was confirmed through team self-evaluation and external review (Dale 1992). During 1993 NTOC moved into a further phase.

NTOC continues to work with communities in community development planning facilitation, and also places a major emphasis on community management training and planning education. NTOC is preparing to offer a specialised Aboriginal Community Planning Module, as part of a certificate in Aboriginal Community Administration. The module draws on that offered by South Australia DETAFE. The NTOC team has worked together, with staff from other agencies, and with Aboriginal planning specialists to substantially modify the South Australia module so that it reflects the particular context, needs, issues, and culture of Aboriginal communities in central Australia (NTOC c1992/3). NTOC used the draft set of modules in a residential training course attended by Aboriginal students, and encouraged the students to critique the materials and suggest changes which would better reflect Aboriginal culture and needs: changes which have been incorporated into the teaching modules.

The new phase is supported through a new funding agreement between NTOC and DEET. Through it NTOC is to provide support and education in developing plans, monitoring and evaluating plans, developing community strategies, implementing planning objectives, communicating

and negotiating plans, and making connections between community plans and ATSIC Regional Council plans.

The refocussing of the NTOC community development planning program on community planning education is consistent with the NTOC mission as an educational and training institution, and consistent with the community development planning team's commitment to a planning process which not only produces better plans but also better planners.

Strengths of the NTOC and its approach

The NTOC and its approach to community planning emerged from, and is fully grounded in a community development and community participation tradition. It has many strengths. For example it

- is positioned within an existing educational institution which has a tradition of and experience with serving Aboriginal clients;

- has the structure and staff to give client communities long-term rather than short-term planning support;

- uses a team of staff to provide client communities with the requisite range of planning, community development, and facilitation skills, as well as knowledge of central Australian Aboriginal society and culture, and facility in local Aboriginal languages;

- has demonstrated an ability to adapt as an organisation and to learn from its own experiences;

- uses regular self-evaluation plus external evaluation as a planning tool for realignment of the organisation and its implementation strategy;

- experiments with different service delivery models resulting in use of an increasingly wide range of service delivery methods;

- deliberately links plans production with training Aboriginal community members in community development planning;

- endeavours to strike a balance between emphasis on appropriate process, and production of planning documents;

- is using team experience and advice from Aboriginal clients to ensure that planning models and the planning process reflect Aboriginal culture and concepts;

- has recognised that Aboriginal communities lack the bargaining and negotiating capability needed to access government funding programs and has taken initial steps to incorporate some training in bargaining and negotiating into the planning process;

- makes effective use of the technology of computers in recording and displaying materials;

- endeavours to develop community plans which are comprehensible by a good proportion of community members; and

- makes a deliberate link in the planning process between community vision and goals and specific action projects.

Some issues arising

The NTOC community development planning program experience provides graphic illustration of some of the problems which the emerging institutions for support of Aboriginal community planning all contend with. NTOC has, like other planning support institutions, struggled with the problems inherent in having two different and perhaps incompatible aims:

- to carry out a careful planning process whereby community control of the process and expansion of client skills are the most important outcome; and

- to produce plans that are comprehensive, detailed and acceptable by government agencies within the time frame (often short) predetermined by the funding agency.

One problem for planning support institutions is finding an appropriate balance between community control, a careful planning process, expansion of community capability, and plan production. Determining what role to play in support of plan implementation is another major challenge. To be of any real value plans must not only be drawn up, they must also be implemented.

NTOC has recognised that communities are poorly equipped to bargain and negotiate with government agencies for implementation of the project components of the community plan, and has incorporated a coaching and training role into its program. Government agencies are also poorly prepared to respond to the community plans which they themselves are now sponsoring. Agency field staff do not have authority to respond directly to requests or to enter into negotiations. They could advise on steps to be taken, but seldom do so (Dale and Burkett c1992; 22, 24). Many projects identified in community plans depend on cooperation and coordination between several government agencies for effective implementation. Although most agencies have endorsed the need for development of community plans, they have not put in place effective mechanisms to make use of the plans, and have not developed strategies for inter-agency cooperation (Wolfe 1993b, 34–46).

Again like other similar organisations, NTOC spends much time and staff energy pursuing funds. Lack of security and continuity of funding have several negative consequences for the NTOC program, including

- turnover and loss of skilled and experienced personnel;

- shifts in program emphasis; and

- shifts in expectations of products and outcomes on the part of the funding agencies which confuse both the NTOC team and the client communities.

NTOC is committed to empowerment of Aboriginal people and communities, and has developed programs which contribute to Aboriginal empowerment. It is making a major contribution to Aboriginal planning through its emphasis on developing Aboriginal models in conjunction with Aboriginal students and client communities. It has, so far, had limited success in recruiting Aboriginal staff.

Community development planning by Aboriginal organisations in the West Kimberley

Pioneering community development in the West Kimberley

Community development planning has a long history in the West Kimberley area of remote northern Western Australia, and has been associated with attempts by Aboriginal groups to re-establish some control over their lives, and their traditional lands and resource base, where those have been appropriated by mining and pastoral leases, and other powerful interests, including the State. In this they have been supported by churches and by some labour unions, often in the form of community development workers and facilitators.

For some years staff of the Aboriginal resource and support agencies in Derby and Fitzroy Crossing, with assistance from and in cooperation with a specialist community planning firm, Northern Building Consultants, have been working on and carrying out innovative approaches to community planning. Through lengthy and cautious trial and testing, the facilitators developed what they called the Community Building Working Framework (CBWF) (McCauley 1990).

The Framework consisted of a series of steps, which included: Picture Building, Testing the Waters, Initial Structure, and Implementation. Picture Building involved collection of information about the community, focussing particularly on the peoples' own perceptions of their situation, and on locally generated data. In the Testing the Waters

phase the community, or group, would review its situation and decide which issues it wants to work on as short, medium and longer term priorities. The Initial Structure referred to the establishment of some sort of committee or working group which deals with the ongoing issues. The purpose of planning is to get something to happen. In the Implementation phase this had to be planned and monitored for continued effectiveness and relevance (McCauley 1990). The Framework provided a particularised way of saying **what, why, how, who** and **when**.

In each of the steps the CBWF used the visual and relational device of the circle, with the key component or major community issue placed in the centre, and related matters arrayed around it. For example, if abuse of alcohol was a key concern, family, housing, health, nutrition, education, jobs, youth recreation, and so on, would be arrayed around the central focus: substance abuse. They are all part of the problem, and part of the solution. The device visually communicated and demonstrated the interrelated and holistic nature of community problems (McCauley 1990). Ready acceptance of this conceptual and visual device by Aboriginal communities demonstrated that they recognised only too well how their problems are interconnected.

The CBWF approach placed emphasis on getting an early start on do-able projects with achievable results, to generate confidence within the group. The circle device ensured, though, that major issues which required a long-term approach did not get neglected. Once key concerns were identified, strategies for dealing with them were developed, and action steps identified. Typically, these would be set out on a large wall display in the community or organisation office, to be used as an action tool.

The innovation, and the success of the Community Building approach, is attributable to its grounding in and adherence to community development principles: that the purpose of the activity is to increase the capacity of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities to direct their own future and to determine the nature and pace of change. Unlike some other

community planning methods, this approach ensures that recognition is given to and use made of the inner resources a group has within it, and that attention is paid to what people can do for themselves. It encourages a balance between self-reliance and use of government aid and programs. To a greater extent than most community planning processes, it endeavours to link the principle and practice of community choice and control over the planning and development agenda, with the programs and the project development orientation of government funding and service delivery agencies. As such it achieves some success in getting improvements to physical infrastructure and other social services because it **uses** government programs and funding streams to achieve community goals; but it does not take the identification and implementation of physical projects as its primary purpose or point of departure.

In contrast, many planning activities in and for Aboriginal communities are primarily directed to identifying projects and delivering programs to Aboriginal communities in the expectation that more activity and more money spent can bring about improvements in Aboriginal living conditions and Aboriginal well-being. The recent analysis by Leverage and Lea of Aurukun, in northern Queensland attests to the fallacy of such an approach. They comment that

> The [Aurukun] Shire administration has not come to terms with the region of the Shire and concentrates its energy on the town itself where planning is devoted to the material elelments of cost effectiveness in traditional town design...The current town plan is based on maximising use of existing infrastructure, and therefore Aurukun, which already has the highest density of housing of any remote Aboriginal settlement in northern Australia, is currently further increasing that housing density. The Aurukun town area has become a ghetto and recent housing additions have furthered this 'ghetto-isation' (Leveridge & Lea 1993, 23).

Implementation of the West Kimberley community-based planning model was achieving successes, especially as applied by the Aboriginal resource agencies in Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. However, staff and the

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cooperating consultants could not meet the need for community development planning in the area. Also, some of the principles of effective community development were not being sufficiently fulfilled. For example, although the model was based on community involvement, it did not adequately train Aboriginal people in community development and community planning. Furthermore, though sensitively adapted for use with Aboriginal communities, the models for community development planning were not generated, or even significantly modified or redesigned by Aboriginal people themselves. In other words they were not yet transformed into an Aboriginal Community-Based Developmental Planning Framework.

The West Kimberley community development planning and training proposal

A review undertaken in 1989 of the resource centres resulted in a recommendation for an expanded community development planning project. In recognition of the success of the West Kimberley approach, and in recognition of the need for a shift to greater Aboriginal involvement and control of the community development process, staff of the resource agencies and the consultants worked to develop a proposal for an expansion and course change for community development planning in the area (West Kimberley Resources Agencies 1990). The proposal was supported by four 'sponsor agencies', ATSIC, DEET, Department of Community Services of Western Australia and the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority of Western Australia. According to these agencies, the aim of the scheme is to develop authentic community driven plans which will provide Regional Councils, and all other resource providers, with a valid and reliable information base from which to make decisions and set priorities (Planning and Community Development – West Kimberley 1990).

The original proposal had three major elements: community development, service delivery planning, and regional planning. Community development, according to the West Kimberley project proposal:

- is an intensive process of working and planning with people which emphasises group ownership and control and aims at people doing their own planning at their own pace;

- The process emphasises the transfer of skills to the community. In some cases this will mean starting with very small scale community plans while in other cases the plans will be more comprehensive; and

- Always the emphasis is on what the community can do for itself and/or what it needs to do for itself (West Kimberley Resources Agencies 1990).

According to the proposal, a coordinator would be hired to oversee the whole project. The community development planning work would be carried out by a Community Development Unit, consisting of an experienced community development worker/trainer and several Aboriginal trainees. The CDUs would be attached to each of the three Aboriginal resource agencies. Further, service delivery planning would be supported by having a service delivery planning officer based in each resource centre to act as a liaison between Aboriginal community groups and external, largely government, agencies. The proposal suggested that the officer would collate Commonwealth and State department plans, discuss them with communities, and relay problems and concerns to relevant departments.

Because of recent legislation, the positioning of regional planning within the project has had to be modified. ATSIC legislation gives Aboriginal Regional Councils responsibility for the development of regional plans. While the contribution of community planning and plans to regional planning is widely acknowledged as vital input, each Regional Council has authority to determine how it will develop its regional plan and how

it will link community level and regional level planning (Wolfe 1993c). However, the project rating system developed and tested by the Cairns ATSIC office (Wolfe 1993c, 37–39), and revised and now officially used by ATSIC to rate applications for deliberation and approval by Regional Councils, uses a combined rating based on five criteria: one of which is 'What is the importance of the project to the community?' Where they exist, community plans are an important source of information and response to this criterion.

A proposal was forwarded from the West Kimberley to funding agencies in late 1990. The proposal requested $400,000 for the three agencies, Mamabulanjin in Broome, Wanang Ngari in Derby, and Marra Worra Worra in Fitzroy Crossing. DEET and ATSIC staff in Canberra failed to reach agreement with the resource agencies on the level of funding for the project. In early 1991 the agencies rejected an offer on the grounds that funding was guaranteed only for the two months remaining in the 1990/91 financial year. By the end of 1991, the project had been funded through the ATSIC community development planning program at the proposed level, and staff were recruited in early 1992.

West Kimberley Community Development Units (CDUs)

The Community Development Units attached to Mamabulanjin, Wanang Ngari and Marra Worra Worra are staffed by a specialist planner and a trainer and two to six associates, the majority of whom are Aboriginal, as is the project coordinator. Each resource agency executive manages its own CDU, and there is an overall steering committee, with representation from the project and the resource agencies and ATSIC. A senior project officer from the ATSIC State office in Perth, who has both ATSIC field officer experience and experience as a staff member of a resource agency, is the liaison person, project monitor and evaluation adviser.

Recruitment of CDU staff was guided by a deliberate policy of balancing older and younger staff and men and women with the skills and

experience necessary for Aboriginal community development planning. The Mamabulanjin CDU is completely Aboriginal staffed. Highly experienced non-Aboriginal staff presently hold one of the senior positions in each of the Marra Worra Worra and Wanang Ngari CDUs. All other positions are held by Aborigines.

The coordinator and CDU staff are trying to strike a balance between staff training, which is regarded as vital and an on-going part of the project, and getting on with the job of doing developmental planning with communities and Aboriginal groups.

The CDUs have explicitly adopted a mutual learning philosophy (Hall 1978; Friedmann 1973, 1987) in which the staff planners and trainers and the trainees exchange knowledge and skills. The trainees are community members with intimate local knowledge; the other staff have experience in the practice of community planning, community development, and training. A similar philosophy guides the actions of the CDU staff when working with communities, each has knowledge and skills which need to be shared for more effective planning to occur.

Staff training is conceived as having two distinct but related components: those dealing with project administration, and those dealing with the operational aspects of community development planning. Administrative modules include: documentation preparation, recording and filing; financial management; organisation structures and reporting systems; and work assessment and assignment. The operational modules for community development planning training include: data compilation; understanding, using and adapting the Community Building Framework (McCauley 1990; Flick 1992); and a host of skills such as group facilitation, team building, problem solving, needs analysis, and many others.

To do the job expected of them staff need skills in many of these areas. Between them, staff already have many of these skills, and are themselves a source of information and skills development. They are by no means 'empty vessels' to be filled and trained. The same community

development principles which staff will use when working with communities are used and reinforced through staff training. These include the assumption that staff (like communities) have an array of skills and considerable knowledge, which should be identified, built on, and expanded, not ignored or replaced; and the assumption that the best working models are those which people develop for themselves.

The CDUs see their objectives as:

- the empowerment of Aboriginal communities;

- placing communities at the centre of planning activities;

- imparting planning, development and management skills to communities;

- improving coordination and planning of service delivery (Planning and Community Development – West Kimberley 1990, 1; Flick 1992, 1); and

- working with communities to develop the structures necessary to use their own and new skills, and to implement and manage community plans (Flick 1992, 1).

The planning process envisaged by the CDUs resembles, but is not identical to the Community Building Working Framework which preceded it. The CDU planning process identifies and consciously links three levels: the first, or 'shopping list' level, identifies tools and assets such as generators, water bores, houses and so on, which contribute to improvement of people's basic material needs for survival and living; the second level deals with intangibles in which people express their need for better education and better services which expand their capacity to deal with the external forces that impact on their lives; the third is the base from which people experience 'empowerment' through recognition of shared history, shared values, and the values people want to pass on to their children (Flick 1990, 2). The CDU goal is to use the techniques of

planning to go beyond community development to community empowerment (Flick 1990, 1–3).

Strengths of the West Kimberley CDUs' approach

The West Kimberley approach to community development planning has a mix of elements which are proving important for effective Aboriginal community planning (Lea and Wolfe 1993). These include:

- 'dedicated' specialist and general staff directly responsible for the day-to-day work of community planning;

- a largely Aboriginal staff, with considerable experience and skills, and the potential to be influential role models;

- staffing levels which are sufficiently high as to ensure that each team has a range of skills and experience;

- a team, rather than an individual approach to planning and problem solving;

- staff training as an integral part of the project. Project management and administration skills, as well as community development and planning skills are being strengthened;

- a mutual learning philosophy which guides staff to staff relationships and staff to community relationships;

- potential to provide training to communities to enable them to increase their capacity to plan for themselves;

- a tested and proven community development planning framework to build on;

- use of a community development planning framework which involves careful assessment of development options and the implications of making particular choices, by the people most concerned and affected by projects or changes under consideration;

- potential, in the context of staff training and working with communities, to modify the community development planning model which they inherited (Flick 1992);

- potential to develop locally constructed community development planning models which are fully in an Aboriginal idiom and grounded in Aboriginal processes and concepts. Aboriginal community development and community planning models may emerge, as more and more Aboriginal people become directly engaged in the developmental process;

- location within existing Aboriginal agencies. The CDUs are able to build on resource centre experience, credibility and acceptance by communities. They contribute to, rather than draw energy away from, Aboriginal organisations. They complement, rather than challenge, existing Aboriginal organisations;

- Aboriginal control of the project. Aborigines not only operate the project, they manage and control it. ATSIC presently maintains a low key and generally supportive stance and monitors the project; and

- ability to provide consistent and on-going planning support to communities (subject to the exigencies of funding provision).

The CDUs are instruments of Aboriginal empowerment and re-empowerment in that they are Aboriginal controlled and staffed, contribute to Aboriginal capacity strengthening through training and through community-based approaches to planning, and are committed to identification and implementation of Aboriginal priorities at several levels.

Some issues arising

The West Kimberley community development planning project was conceived as a single project. Not surprisingly, given the physical

distance between them, the different characteristics of the Aboriginal clientele in each service area, and the particular history and structure of each resource agency, each agency is taking a rather different path. For example, Mamabulanjin has been paying particular attention to staff training and organisational issues. Marra Worra Worra staff are working directly with communities. Such differences are to be expected, and should be respected, rather than discouraged, or regarded as a problem. Nonetheless, the differences can be a source of friction within the overall project, and a challenge to effective coordination.

The relationship between community level planning and community-based plans, and regional plans and planning by ATSIC Regional Councils remains a cloudy and unresolved issue. In Fitzroy Crossing the issue has been addressed through establishment of a close

> relationship between Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation, the outstation resource centre in Fitzroy Crossing, and the Bandaral Ngadu Regional Council which covers the Fitzroy Valley, the same area serviced by Marra Worra Worra. The executive of the resource centre was elected as the Regional Council (Crough 1993, 113).

In the Broome area, on the other hand, tensions have arisen between the CDU and the Regional Council over the allocation and handling of funds, and the relationship between the two levels of planning.

Adequacy of funding and security of funding are major limiting factors for the West Kimberley CDUs. The real costs of any form of service delivery in remote areas are high, in large part due to the capital, maintenance and operating costs of vehicles. While offices do not need to be elaborate, they require space and furniture. Microcomputers and printers are a necessary part of project recording and reporting in the 1990s, and a necessary component in training of administrative, planning and community development staff. Initial capital outlay, regular maintenance, and system up-grading are legitimate and necessary project costs. The West Kimberley project has a sizeable staff component: the

integration of community development planning with staff training demands a high planning and development specialist/trainer to trainee ratio. The project is not one that can or should be run on a shoe-string budget.

Furthermore, education and effective training are not short-term activities; they need to be sustained over years rather than months. Like many Aboriginal organisations and community-based organisations, the CDUs lurch from funding crisis to funding crisis, staff spend a great deal of time writing and rewriting funding proposals — time that could be spent on community development planning and training. Both trainers and trainees would benefit from some job security beyond a few months.

The CDUs are challenged by the magnitude of the planning needs in each of their service areas. They are challenged to support all client groups equitably, to balance staff training with community-level capacity building, to respond to crisis situations and to achieve some positive short-term results, to accomplish both broad-based community involvement and the production of plans, and to somehow address the great structural issue of re-establishing a greater degree of Aboriginal control of the land and resource base.

In attempting to carry out staff and community training, ensure broad-based community involvement, address these significant structural issues, and to contribute to Aboriginal community empowerment and greater control of decisions, the CDUs may fall short in meeting community, regional, agency and government expectations for carrying out community planning.

Sustaining Aboriginal community development planning: key elements and problem areas

The three organisations which are having some successes in carrying out community development planning in Aboriginal communities in the north-west, centre and south of Australia offer approaches to Aboriginal

community planning which differ substantially from preceding or prevailing approaches adopted by government agencies. Agencies either carry out limited program or project-specific planning; experiment, as DEET and ATSIC did (Wolfe 1993a) with staff-implemented community planning; or, as ATSIC does now through its Community-Based Planning Program (ATSIC 1993; Wolfe 1993b) provide funds to communities and organisations which then, typically, hire consultants to prepare community plans under short-term agreements.

The West Kimberley CDUs, the South Australia DETAFE CMTU, and the NTOC CDP team, on the other hand, are special, multi-purpose, non-profit organisations which:

- use informal and/or formal training to increase the capability of Aboriginal communities, leaders and members to plan effectively;

- treat community planning as a component of effective community management and administration;

- provide continuity by working with Aboriginal client communities on a long-term basis;

- endeavour to have the Aboriginal community control the pace and direction of planning;

- apply a community development model which places emphasis both on what people can do for themselves with a minimum of outside financial and other assistance and on what the community requires external agencies of state, territory and federal governments to do for it;

- employ a team approach and combine staff planning and community development expertise with group facilitation skills, knowledge of Aboriginal culture and decision-making processes and, where appropriate, facility in Aboriginal languages; male and female members of the team work separately with men and women especially in more traditionally oriented Aboriginal communities; and

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- are part of a larger and older organisation which has established credibility and legitimacy with both government agencies and its client groups.

The cost of maintaining planning support and training organisations like the West Kimberley CDUs or the NTOC CDP team is often compared, unfavourably, with the cost of hiring consultants to prepare community plans. The consulting firm is paid to complete a time-limited task. With a few outstanding exceptions, consulting firms do not have the necessary array of skills in small-place community-based integrated planning, community development, facilitation, and knowledge of and empathy with Aboriginal people as individuals and in groups. Planning support and training organisations, on the other hand, have taken on the long-term task of supporting communities through the entire planning process and of training Aboriginal people to direct and to carry out the process with increasing effectiveness, and have attempted to recruit and retain experienced and skilled staff.

All three organisations are adversely affected in their ability to offer consistent long-term support to client communities and in their ability to recruit and retain their staff, by inadequacy of funding and insecurity of funding. Generally, government programs are geared to the production of plans, not to establishment and support of organisations to undertake planning and planning training. Consequently the organisations have to cobble financial support together from a number of different sources, and are scrutinised and evaluated by funders and clients on very different expectations of outcomes and different measures of successful performance.

Expectations on the part of upper tier government, funding agencies, other Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal client communities, and even the planning support agencies themselves, for dramatic improvements in the quantity, pace and quality of Aboriginal community planning, are unrealistic. As illustrated, the organisations face many obstacles. Not all their decisions, nor those of client communities carrying out planning,

will necessarily be effective, and may, on occasion, appear – and be – inappropriate. Aboriginal community planning takes place in a context of lack of information, fierce internal politics, powerful external pressures, shifting government policies, and constant change and uncertainty. Nevertheless, the organisations and their approaches, hold considerable promise of reasonable and sustainable ways of doing community planning and increasing Aboriginal power to decide: promise which will not be realised in a few months, or even a few years, and which may produce unanticipated outcomes which challenge current planning practice.

The NTOC CDP team and the West Kimberley CDUs, in particular, represent the emergence of organisations which recognise that conventional planning models and processes are not consistent or compatible with Aboriginal needs and processes, and are committed to working towards development of Aboriginal models and processes. They promote identification and implementation, by Aboriginal people, of models of planning grounded in Aboriginal concepts, culture and experience, and Aboriginal models of appropriate process and purpose.

The West Kimberley CDUs illustrate a further step: emergence of community development planning organisations which are Aboriginal staffed, managed and controlled, and which link the doing of developmental planning, with on the job experiential training of community members and of staff.

In this they are part of a process which is gathering momentum in Canada (Taylor-Henley & Hudson 1992), New Zealand (Fleras 1989), and Australia (Rowse 1992, Coombs 1993), whereby Aboriginal people not only administer and deliver services to their communities on behalf of government agencies: they also control and shape services by exercising decision-making authority through their own organisations. Such Aboriginal planning and training organisations represent an important step in the direction of greater Aboriginal autonomy, empowerment and self-government.

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