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Partnerships for Indigenous Development: International Development NGOs, Aboriginal Organisations and Communities

J. Hunt

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Janet Hunt is a Fellow at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Research School of Social Sciences, College of Arts and Social Sciences, The Australian National University.

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines two pilot case studies which examine how international development non-government organisations (INGOs) conduct their work with Aboriginal organisations and communities in Australia. I was keen to explore how INGOs working with Indigenous communities and community organisations reflected the community development (or bottom-up) approaches which both the Indigenous sector and the INGO sector favour. This is in contrast to the service-delivery (or top-down) approach more common in government-funded programs. I also wanted to investigate the 'partnerships' operating between INGOs and Indigenous organisations or programs. 'Partnership' has become a word used to mean almost any type of relationship between organisations, so I wanted to explore what 'partnership' meant in these cases. The first part of the paper sets out the rationale for the study, examines the available literature, and outlines the approach I took in developing the research. The two case studies follow. Each describes the two organisations and their programs relevant to the partnership I researched. It then examines some of the features of these partnerships and the program approaches taken, and draws some conclusions about what have been important factors in their success. The study also highlights some of the challenges these case study partnerships face. A brief conclusion reflects on some of the issues these case studies raise for Indigenous development in Australia more broadly.

Keywords: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; Indigenous; community development; international development; non-government organisations; partnership.

FOREWORD

We often hear Australia referred to as 'the Lucky Country' but Indigenous people do not share in this bounty. History and fact give testament to the lack of opportunity afforded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through poorer health standards, lower levels of education, lower levels of employment and poorer housing. We have an average life expectancy 17 years less than our fellow Australians. It is well documented that in some areas Aboriginal communities experience health levels that are equivalent to those in the third world. Yet, concern is often expressed by those working on Indigenous disadvantage in this country that it is harder to get Australians interested in donating to improve the conditions of Aboriginal people than it is to get them to donate to people in the third world.

So much of the Indigenous affairs portfolio is dictated by crisis. Governments respond to one catastrophe after another and very little is done within a political cycle that focuses on long-term solutions. The non-government sector, particularly international non-government organisations, have a crucial role to play in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in developing capacity and human capital and in developing effective, community-based responses in areas of critical need.

This research project undertaken by Janet Hunt is designed to document the experience of international non-government organisations (INGOs) and assist them to develop best practice approaches to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is designed to articulate what works and what doesn't in building relationships and developing partnerships and therefore assist in shaping the processes INGOs and others employ when working with Indigenous Australians.

Research in Australia and North America has detailed that better socioeconomic outcomes are achieved when Indigenous people are involved in setting priorities within their community, the development of policy, the delivery of services and the implementation of programs. Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage means governments at all levels have to take responsibility for the provision of three things as a matter of right:

- adequate standards of essential services
- adequate provision of infrastructure, and
- investment in human capital.

This is a simple formula and it has been shown in numerous reports into issues such as the high levels of sexual assault within Indigenous communities that dysfunction in Indigenous communities is the result of decades of neglect where underfunding on essential services and infrastructure, and little or no investment in human capital, compound to create dysfunction in some communities as the social fabric unravels.

A key aspect of this agenda is the development of social capital within Aboriginal communities, creating leadership, skills and the quality of human relationships and exchanges. We know that social capital can be built up when people solve shared problems and satisfy economic, spiritual, recreational and other needs to levels that change over time. It is undermined when people are dehumanised, deprived of the basic and necessary levels of housing, education and health and when politics is used as a divisive instrument.

Non-government bodies often express concern that, although they would like to do something, they are not quite sure what that might be. They have no mechanism by which to consult with Aboriginal people and no network to build a relationship with Aboriginal communities. It is often a good idea to partner with an Aboriginal organisation or use an Indigenous consultant with a good reputation who can give this advice, this support, this expertise and an entrée into the Indigenous community—and give a heads up about the community politics.

There is also too little evaluation of what works and what doesn't in relation to effective Aboriginal programs and policies so it is important to have a process to facilitate a research-based approach to an issue. Having said that, we have learnt as much from our failures as we have from our successes in dealing with the complex issues that face Indigenous people, their families and their communities. What is also needed is a long-term commitment to this area as there are very few instances where quick wins have occurred.

The problems facing Indigenous communities are so vast and complicated that there is a need for a strong and varied presence from the non-government sector. Their sustained interest and work can avoid the problem of policy and program changing with every change of government. That is, a sustained commitment for the long-term to ensure the fostering and success of community projects is easier to achieve through non-government sources.

The key role the non-government sector can play in this regard is to add value and model alternative approaches, including in areas which government is unable or unwilling to tackle. It is a sector in the unique position of being able to respond to the initiative of others because they are not burdened with the expectation and responsibility of governments so do not need to respond to and be governed by public opinion polls.

Investment and expertise will not work if the money injected into communities is guided by what outsiders think are the priorities and solutions. In order to avoid this benevolent paternalism, it is important that a relationship be developed either with Indigenous communities and leaders and/or Indigenous organisations. These relationships need to be guided by Indigenous aspirations and the essential oil in this relationship is trust. Trust cannot be imposed, it cannot be demanded it can only be earned.

INGOs are better placed to develop the relationship of trust needed to work in Aboriginal communities than are governments and bureaucrats. The relationship an NGO develops with Indigenous organisations is a relationship that needs to be both practical and realistic. There needs to be an understanding that, because many of these initiatives will be new and innovative, there may be failures. And as disappointing as that may be for those who have invested time and money, this has to be acknowledged as a natural part of finding the best and most workable solutions to issues where government policy has failed for decades and sometimes centuries.

In light of this, it becomes all the more important to keep pushing the successes and applying the same principles that guide commercial decisions. It means not expecting rewards for short term investments and understanding that to achieve results there needs to be a continual and trusting and committed relationship that understands that only listening, flexibility and innovation as a basis for programs and support will bring solutions in the long term. And these will be long-term solutions that government is ill equipped to deliver.

Janet Hunt's work is an important contribution to assisting the more effective and confident workings of the INGO sector in seeking to provide support to Indigenous communities. We were very pleased to be able to support this important work.

Professor Larissa Behrendt
Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning
University of Technology Sydney

INTRODUCTION

This study was first discussed following a workshop on 'Creating links between overseas development and the Indigenous sector' held at the Australian Council for International Development's 2007 Annual Conference. At that workshop, two international development non-government organisations (INGOs) presented some of their work and discussed the issues and challenges involved in working within Australia with Indigenous organisations and communities. Professor Larissa Behrendt from the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning also spoke, with a view to developing stronger linkages between INGOs and Indigenous Australians. A high level of interest was evident among the forty or more INGO representatives attending.

What became clear during the discussions was that INGOs appeared to work differently from governments (the dominant source of funds for Indigenous organisations) in their relationships and approaches to Indigenous Australia. This research was conceived to try to capture some of the ways in which the partnerships between these INGOs and their Indigenous partners were operating, and to explore how this contributed to successful programs in Indigenous communities. This research proposed to study and document a small number of these successful approaches—whether programs, projects, or partnerships for advocacy and policy work, to draw out the lessons about why they are succeeding—both in terms of the project or program design and in terms of the nature of the partnerships between the INGO and the Indigenous community or organisation(s).

Approximately 10 international development non-government organisations based in Australia are working or have worked with Indigenous Australians in a variety of ways. A number are gearing up to develop more significant programs in recognition of the need for a model of working in Indigenous communities beyond service delivery and welfare, and others are considering becoming engaged with Indigenous programs. These organisations generally claim to practice and/or support community development approaches within their international and Australian Indigenous programs.

While community development was being practiced in Indigenous Australia in the 1970s, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and others took it forward with community-based planning projects in the late 1980s and early 1990s with varied success (Lea & Wolfe 1993; Wolfe 1993a, 1993b, 1994). The idea of community development and community participation in development is best exemplified by the work of the many community-based Aboriginal organisations that have emerged in response to needs identified by Aboriginal communities. These organisations, diverse as they are, have articulated Indigenous solutions to Indigenous problems or issues and best reflect community-driven development approaches. They are articulating Indigenous development goals (social, cultural and economic) and responding to them directly, rather than responding to externally-driven development agendas. They have also provided opportunities for Indigenous people to develop skills, gain income, demonstrate leadership, sustain culture and mentor others. Of these, the Community Development Employment Projects program (CDEP) was meant to be a key vehicle for community development, though not all local CDEP implementations had the skills and wherewithal to be able to do so. Where they have, CDEP organisations have played an important role underpinning other community-based initiatives, such as arts centres, environmental initiatives, and the development of small-scale community enterprises etc. The closure of the CDEP scheme in mid-2009 in all but remote parts of Australia is having effects in all these sectors (Altman & Jordan 2009).

Though government funding of different sectors (e.g. health, housing) has supported these Indigenous community initiatives, governments in Australia generally seem to struggle with responding to or facilitating more holistic Indigenous-driven developments, particularly those which do not fit neatly into particular departmental programs. Some funding programs may support community development approaches, but there seems to be limited community development emphasis in policies.

INGO:
international
development
non-government
organisation

ATSIC:
Aboriginal
and Torres
Strait Islander
Commission

CDEP:
Community
Development
Employment
Projects
program

Within international development policies, on the other hand, participative community-driven approaches are emphasised to a much greater degree. To this end, a whole raft of tools and processes are used to stimulate community participation in development, to foster greater participation by women in particular, and to address issues of empowerment within communities (e.g. Chambers 2002). International development experience has brought home very forcefully the likely failure of any initiatives when such processes are ignored. In particular the emphasis on sustainability of development projects requires INGOs and governments to ensure that local people are fully engaged in community projects, and can maintain their benefits after the life of the project ends. While success isn't guaranteed, there are real efforts made in this regard which seem strangely absent in relation to many developments in Indigenous communities where things are often done *for* or *to* people rather than *with* them, and often crossing sectoral boundaries for more holistic approaches requires grant-seeking and juggling skills of a high order.

Within international development there has been a lively critique of the extent to which participatory approaches genuinely empower more marginalised members of the community, or whether they are exercises in manipulation by power-holders (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Gujit & Shah 1998; Hickey & Mohan 2004); I see these as healthy debates which are largely absent in Australian Indigenous development. The best people here seem to get is ritual 'consultation' with a perception of little feedback or follow-up. As Altman noted some years ago, over the past 30 years 'government policy has perpetuated dependence, governance has been for dependence, not development' (Altman 2002: 4).

Laverack and Labonte (2000) capture some of the differences between what they refer to as 'top-down' approaches and 'bottom-up' approaches in relation to health programs, for example, while noting that, in practice, they are not mutually exclusive.

Their paper tries to show how the differences can be resolved in practice in health promotion programs. However, their schema (see Table 1) usefully indicates some critical differences—in terms of approach, problem definition, roles of various players, and community control—which resonate. For INGOs, the 'bottom-up' approach to community empowerment most closely matches their philosophical positions, whereas the 'top-down' model more closely approximates the approach evident in traditional government service delivery.

While the paucity of literature on community development in Indigenous Australian communities is noted in a review study by Smith et al. (n.d.), they recommend exploring use of this approach further as there is some evidence of empowerment and increased control contributing to the social determinants of health. However, community development experience in Indigenous Australia is not always successful or easy. As Eversole's study shows, participation is complex, and mobilising people to engage in change is fraught with difficulties. The relationships and motivations for change, and issues of who and what drives change are often poorly understood. But as Eversole (2003: 792) emphasises,

The complex networks of relationships underlying development activities can be understood through attention to the basic concepts of power, motivation, legitimacy, and trust.

Focusing on these issues seems to be important if change is to be driven and owned by Aboriginal people themselves, and hence sustained. The difficulty for government officials, even with the best of intentions, of sharing power and allowing Aboriginal leadership is exemplified in the Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba (2007) study of a health program in Arnhem land.

The research reported here was keen to explore how INGOs working with Indigenous communities and community organisations reflected the community development (or bottom-up) approaches which both the Indigenous sector and the INGO sector favour. This is in contrast to the service-delivery (or top-down) approach more common in government-funded programs.

Table 1. Key differences between top-down and bottom-up approaches

	Top-down	Bottom-up
Root metaphor	Individual responsibility	Empowerment
Approach/orientation	Weakness/deficit Solve problem	Strength/capacity Improve competence
Definition of problem	By outside agent such as government	By community
Primary vehicles for health promotion and change	Education, improved services, lifestyle	Building community control, resources and capacities toward economic, social and political change
Role of outside agents	Service delivery and resource allocation	Respond to needs of community
Primary decision makers	Agency representatives, business leaders, 'appointed community leaders'	Indigenous appointed leaders
Community control of resources	Low	High
Community ownership	Low	High
Evaluation	Specific risk factors Quantifiable outcomes and 'targets'	Pluralistic methods documenting changes of important to the community

Source: Laverack & Labonte 2000: 256; by permission of Oxford University Press.

It is also relevant that increasingly in international development there is a growing focus on rights-based approaches to development. Such approaches attempt to base development on the international framework of human rights developed over some 60 years by the United Nations organisation. They take as their starting point that people who are participating in and benefitting from development programs have a range of human rights which need to be respected in the processes of development and which are enhanced by its outcomes (for the application of this schema to Indigenous communities see Calma 2008). Since violations of Indigenous rights are frequently considered to contribute to the excluded and disadvantaged status of many Indigenous people, the way in which such rights-based approaches might influence INGO work with Indigenous Australians is also of some interest.

A further area of exploration is the notion of 'partnership'. 'Partnership' has become a word used to mean almost any type of relationship between organisations, and may in fact simply reflect a contractual undertaking by an Indigenous organisation to deliver a government service to a particular group or in a particular region. Research on Indigenous experience with government 'partnerships' suggests that a number of problems are common, among them the short-term nature of much funding, the compliance and reporting requirements, and the many small 'buckets' of funds from different departments and programs which have to be brought together to address the holistic or interrelated nature of issues facing Indigenous communities (Morgan, Disney & Associates Pty Ltd 2006a).

INGOs are very used to working in partnerships with people in organisations who might be seen as less powerful than themselves, and at least in their rhetoric, they aim to achieve as equal and 'authentic' partnerships (Fowler 1998, 2000) as possible, given the inevitable power which funding bodies from

developed countries hold over those they fund. Thus a considerable debate has occurred in international development about how to make partnerships more equal, notwithstanding the funding context.

Fowler (2000: 4–5) lists what he believes are some of the main features of a genuine partnership between INGOs and developing country non-government organisations (NGOs):

NGO:

non-government
organisation

- partnership is about working together to accomplish agreed results and accepting joint responsibility for achieving them
- partnership carries with it a long-term involvement
- partnership requires defined mutual roles and responsibilities—as covenants not contracts
- partnership is about trust, respect, integrity, accountability and equality
- partnership requires an acceptance of the principle that a local organisation has the right to set the final agenda for its own work
- partnership must not lead to a situation where the link between an organisation's constituency and leadership is weakened
- when negotiating relations or contributions from outside the 'partnership', the spirit and letter of existing partnerships must be taken into account and respected
- within a partnership, neither party can unilaterally accept other relational conditions that materially influence the partnership
- partnership must not alter the basic priorities related to the identity, vision and values of any of the organisations
- an underlying assumption of partnership co-operation is that the organisations concerned will become more competent in reaching their goals beyond this specific relationship.

However, as Fowler points out, not all organisational relationships are partnerships, and he suggests a range of categories of relationship which exist—partnership, institutional supporter, program supporter, project funder, development ally—and which reflect variation in the rights and obligations of the organisations to each other in terms of information, consultation, influence, and shared control. What INGOs call 'partnerships' may be more accurately described as any one of these categories, depending on the circumstances.

Finally it should be noted that, although the levels of funding available from INGOs are much lower than those available from governments, they are less restricted in their focus than funding from government departments. INGOs may also act as brokers between Aboriginal organisations and government or corporate sources of funding, thereby assisting them to manage the interface and the reporting required.

THE SCOPE OF INGO WORK IN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA

It is difficult to form an accurate, up-to-date picture of INGO work in Indigenous Australia. However, a number of INGOs have significant programs, and a number of others may make occasional or smaller contributions.¹ Some of the organisations have engaged in Indigenous programming for many years and have been expanding their programs significantly in the last five years. Other INGOs are newer players in this area or are exploring opportunities to become involved. Thus a picture emerges of a small, but growing engagement by INGOs with Indigenous communities and organisations and an attempt to play a strategic role.

Some of the features INGOs claim to practice when they undertake work with Indigenous organisations and communities include:

- community development principles
- respectful partnerships with Indigenous organisations and communities
- employing and supporting Aboriginal people
- education and training focus
- integrated programs—incorporating capacity building, governance, organisational development
- rights-based approaches
- research, advocacy and policy work.

INGOs can also act as contractors for government programs; it is important to distinguish INGOs operating this way from those operating independently, or largely independently, of government funds. The issue is: whose program is it? Is the program designed and driven by the INGO? Or is the INGO implementing a tendered-out program designed largely by government? The nature of the program may be very different depending on the answers to these questions.

THE APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

To explore these issues further it was decided to undertake a small number of pilot studies, with a view to developing the study further once a framework and approach was established.

Member organisations of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Indigenous Working Group were advised that this study was proposed and invited to nominate themselves and a partner organisation. I did not set out with any preconceived definitions of success in the partnerships or the programs the INGOs supported, but simply asked those organisations volunteering to nominate partnerships which they thought were successful. Both the nominated pilot case studies involved partnerships which had been in place for over five years, in one case supporting the same general program area throughout; in the other, the program supported by the INGO had changed, though the organisational partnership had lasted over many years, and through a variety of programs. The research explored the questions of what made the partnerships successful, and whether both partners shared the same experience and ideas of success.

Initially two organisations indicated a willingness to participate—Oxfam Australia and Caritas Australia. Subsequently, World Vision Australia also volunteered, but after discussions it was agreed that it was too soon to research the partnership suggested, and this would be left until a later study. Furthermore, although Oxfam initially nominated its partnership in the Gulf country, it became evident as planning progressed that this would not be a suitable time to document this partnership. This program had a number of challenges to deal with in the period the research would be carried out, and the research was an additional demand that was better avoided.

Oxfam then suggested that it was planning to undertake an evaluation of its partnership with Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation (or 'Yorgum') in Perth during 2009, and that this might provide a suitable partner for the pilot study. Yorgum was approached, and agreed to participate. Both Oxfam and Yorgum saw their evaluation as a way of exploring my research interests, and Oxfam invited me to be the 'outsider' on their evaluation team (the other members were staff from Oxfam and Yorgum). Thus, the first case study is based on my documentation of a participatory evaluation of a community development program run by Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation with support from Oxfam Australia. This partnership has been operating for

around seven years. I was approached in late March 2009 to be involved in the evaluation—which was to be held in early May—so there was a considerable effort involved to gain relatively quick Human Research Ethics clearance in time for me to participate. I acted as an external member of Oxfam’s evaluation team, with a brief to assist in the process (which was Oxfam-led) and to prepare the final report. At this point I also collected documents from Yorgum and Oxfam and reviewed them with regards to Yorgum’s history, growth and programming. The documents included annual reports, brochures, and project proposals and reports.

The second partnership for the pilot studies is between Caritas Australia and Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes, specifically with their Indigenous financial literacy program operating in central west New South Wales, ‘*Manage your Income: Manage Your Life*’. Caritas and Centacare Wilcannia-Forbes have been working in partnership on a range of projects for almost a decade. The Manage Your Income (MYI) project grew out of some financial counselling work which CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes was undertaking in the wider community, and which alerted their senior financial counsellor to the critical needs among Aboriginal people in the region. Initially there was discussion about my participation in an evaluation of the project in a similar way to the Oxfam experience, but it became clear that CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes had underway a process across the organisation, supported by Social Ventures Australia, to help it build its evaluation capacity, develop baseline data and be in a position in the future to more adequately evaluate its achievements. Accordingly, we agreed that this study should proceed as a more orthodox process of observation of project activities and interviews with key people involved in the partnership and the program; remaining quite separate from the Social Ventures Australia capacity building support for evaluation.

I had a number of broad questions to shape the research, but was aware that I would need to be flexible about how to actually explore these questions. I was conscious that the organisations I was researching are all extremely busy, and often working in difficult circumstances; as a researcher, I did not wish to add to their demands, but rather wanted to conduct the research in the way which would be as easy as possible for the organisations involved. Thus, where the research agenda coincided with the needs of the partners I was keen to try and conduct the research to meet the goals of each. Furthermore, by participating in normal partnership activities I would get a deeper understanding of the partnership dynamics than interviews alone would reveal. Thus the approach to the research was to find a suitable mix of participatory activities and interviews, as well as analysis of documents. The two studies included in this volume were conducted in quite different ways, but the same key questions about the nature of the partnerships and the way community development was interpreted and implemented in the projects were at the heart of both.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research is a development from work previously undertaken by Julie Finlayson for The Australian Collaboration in which she studied success in a number of Aboriginal community organisations (Finlayson 2004; The Australian Collaboration 2007a, 2007b). Other work relating specifically to Indigenous organisations can be found in two handbooks published by Reconciliation Australia (2006, 2008) which illustrate the success factors associated with winners of the Indigenous Governance Awards. All of the above focus on Indigenous organisations and what is required for them to achieve success in their organisational governance and program outcomes. It does not relate to the partnership aspects of their relationships with INGOs, although it does touch on their partnerships with a range of other stakeholders and funders.

Other related work about Indigenous community governance in Australia is documented in research from the Indigenous Community Governance project over the last four years (Hunt & Smith 2006, 2007; Hunt

et al. 2008). This work emphasises the importance of resolving tensions between western and Indigenous approaches to governance if Indigenous community organisations are to develop legitimate governance arrangements, which work for them. As INGOs are essentially western organisational forms, this work is relevant to how they interact with Indigenous organisations and support them to build their capacity.

Research related to INGOs and Indigenous Australia is very sparse and now somewhat dated (Schwab & Sutherland 2002). There have been considerable developments, as noted in a 2007 CAEPR seminar (Hunt & Schwab 2007). Other literature is frequently more focused on the philanthropic sector than the INGOs themselves. The learnings from a number of Telstra Foundation projects with Indigenous organisations are well summarised by Burchill et al. (2006), emphasising the need for trust to build in the partnerships, flexibility in the projects, the importance of philanthropic funding adding leverage to Indigenous community efforts, the need to develop leadership through connection with culture, and to consider the sustainability of the interventions (Burchill et al. 2006). Other related literature reinforces these findings (Dodson 2002; Higgins 2005; Philanthropy Australia 2007). While both philanthropic bodies in Australia and INGOs provide funding support for Indigenous organisations and programs, a key difference is that the INGOs bring their international development philosophies to the task. Nevertheless the results from these philanthropic studies mesh well with the approaches INGOs articulate.

Other literature on partnerships between INGOs and local organisations is more plentiful, although older. This literature emphasises issues of power and trust in partnerships, and the importance for successful development of partnerships being reciprocal in their accountabilities (Fowler 1998). The literature indicates that despite good intentions, INGOs may not build as equal relationships as they would like (Hateley 1997; Lister 1999; Malhotra 1997; Oxfam 1997; Postma 1994). However, Hilhorst's anthropological study of an indigenous NGO in the Philippines demonstrates that indigenous organisations may exercise their own forms of power, and that donors such as INGOs do not hold all the cards (Hilhorst 2003).

Other research which explores funding and partnership relationships between governments and Indigenous organisations in Australia is also of some relevance. Such research indicates that governments must develop skills and frameworks to enable more effective whole-of-government and intergovernmental functioning. Governments must also develop their capacity to build and sustain relationships with Indigenous communities, and to support these governance developments over longer time frames; coercive approaches are not conducive to the sorts of relationships required. Secondly, Indigenous people need to review and strengthen their own governance capacity so that they can take a leadership role in their relations with governments to drive agendas and programs that will improve their lives. A strong role for Indigenous people in designing and implementing solutions is essential to success (Hunt 2007; McCausland 2005; Morgan, Disney & Associates 2006a, 2006b).

To summarise, the literature has focused on what makes for successful Indigenous organisations, and how the tensions between western and Indigenous governance arrangements have to be resolved for governance to be legitimate and successful. There has been some study of the philanthropic sector's support for Indigenous programs and projects but the only research about partnerships with INGOs is now eight years old, and quite out of date due to some significant developments in that period. This was not an in-depth study, rather a survey of the links between these sectors, without further fieldwork exploration of the factors contributing to their success. While there has been considerable research about the partnerships INGOs establish with overseas organisations in developing countries (so-called North-South partnerships), there has been no study about the partnership between such an INGO and an Indigenous organisation in Australia. The research on partnerships between governments and Indigenous organisations emphasises the need for coordinated and long-term relationships which enhance capacity building of Indigenous organisations, and the need for Indigenous organisations to develop sufficient capacity to drive the agendas and programs they need.

CASE STUDY 1

THE PARTNERS:

OXFAM AUSTRALIA AND YORGUM ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Oxfam Australia is an 'independent, not-for-profit, secular community-based international development agency' based in Melbourne (Oxfam Australia 2007: 5). It is a member of a global confederation of 13 Oxfams that work together 'to fight poverty and injustice' (Oxfam Australia 2007: 5) in over 100 countries. Oxfam Australia itself works in 26 countries overseas and for more than 30 years has supported Indigenous Australians in their struggle for social justice. Indigenous Australia is recognised as one of five program regions in which Oxfam Australia works.² Its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partner (ATSIP) Program has grown considerably in recent years to a total value of some \$3 million per year, and is expected to grow further in the period to 2013. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group comprising 17 members provides 'guidance and strategic advice' to Oxfam Australia.

ATSIP:

Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
Partner Program

THE OXFAM APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

The Oxfam family's analysis of global poverty is that it is much more than a lack of income—it sees poverty as multidimensional, and usually associated with a lack of power within a society. Oxfam argues that '[p]oor people need power over their own destinies and over the factors that influence them' (Green 2008: 11). Oxfam believes that poor and marginalised people need to be active citizens to assert their rights, and to hold those in power to account in terms of their responsibilities to citizens. By working collectively, Oxfam argues that oppressed people can challenge the institutional discrimination which excludes them, and thereby improve their own lives. Oxfam therefore sees marginalised people as agents of development: 'good development practices build on the skills, strengths, and ideas of people living in poverty—on their assets' (Green 2008: 7). In other words, Oxfam promotes what is commonly known as asset-based community development (Mathie & Cunningham 2003).

It also adopts a 'rights approach to development', because it believes that an individual knowing they have 'a right to something is much more powerful than simply needing or wanting it. It implies that someone else has a duty to respond.' (Green 2008: 23–4). The responsibilities of so-called 'duty-bearers' (such as states who have duties to provide education, health care etc.) are therefore highlighted. In this framework, the interaction between the state and its citizens is critical—states can make a difference if they adopt the right policies and approaches. Oxfam further believes that rights are of little use without the capabilities to exercise them. Drawing on the work of Amartya Sen (2002), on freedoms and capabilities, Oxfam argues that states have a duty to provide marginalised people with the opportunity to gain capabilities essential to their wellbeing. Equally, this analysis would imply that rights holders should take up such opportunities where they exist, in order to develop their capabilities.

Oxfam Australia (2007: 6) works from this rights-based approach, highlighting five rights which represent the guiding principles for its work:

- the right to a livelihood
- the right to basic services
- the rights to life and security
- the right to be heard and
- the right to gender equality and respect for diversity.

Oxfam working with indigenous peoples: Lessons from Central America and Mexico

Oxfam claimed to work from an 'indigenous perspective' in this region, meaning that it worked with indigenous organisations that promoted their indigeneity and saw cultural strengthening as integral to development; it sought to develop relatively 'horizontal' or equal models of partnership in which two-way trust, transparency, and respect were central; and it drew on the Mayan cosmovision (or indigenous worldview) to promote equitable gender relations between men and women.

The evaluation found that the partnership model was 'highly valued by counterparts and contributed to building stronger indigenous organisations'. In particular, the trusting and respectful relationships Oxfam built with partners, which went beyond funding, enabled the field staff to recognise organisational potential and lend support at critical times. The aspect of cultural strengthening was also seen as important for a number of reasons, including redressing its historical devaluation, its ability to contribute to more sustainable development approaches, and the challenge it may present to assumptions about modernity and poverty which organisations like Oxfam hold. The approaches to gender among Oxfam partners included a human rights/equality lens, and the Mayan cosmovision approach—which saw equity in terms of 'complementarity, equilibrium and duality' within a cultural frame. The evaluation found that discussions about gender issues needed to occur in a context where Oxfam was open to listening, respecting and considering points Indigenous organisations were expressing; enabling the partners to be open in turn to hearing Oxfam staff's concerns, some of which may be valid, some of which may reflect ethnocentrism.

Some issues the evaluation faced were indigenous scepticism about positivist research/evaluation approaches; a lack of a really deep and shared understanding about what it meant to 'work from an indigenous perspective' and about the role of culture in development and how it connects to the rights and aspirations of indigenous communities; and the difficulty of monitoring and evaluating cultural strengthening activities. Furthermore, it emphasised the real difficulty of cross-cultural communication: INGO staff may not recognise the ethnocentrism of their views and hence may unwittingly contribute to resistance on the part of Indigenous people to real dialogue about complex issues.

Source: Oxfam Australia (2008).

These rights underpin its 'One Program' approach which aims to integrate and utilise 'community development, humanitarian responses and advocacy' (Oxfam Australia 2007: 18) across its programs as required to achieve its goals, according to the context. Some of its international programs have been with indigenous people, and an evaluation of its work with indigenous peoples in Central America and Mexico (until it closed its Central America program in 2005, as part of a global Oxfam program rationalisation) is instructive (see the boxed text above).

THE OXFAM AUSTRALIA APPROACH IN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA

Oxfam does not assume that it can translate its international development experience of community development directly into the Australian Indigenous context. That was a lesson the organisation learned some years ago through a partnership with ATSIC³ around community development training for their staff. What Oxfam discovered was that its community development approach was the antithesis of the model used by governments in Australia in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Oxfam's ways of working

- Rights-based approach
- Partnerships
- Long-term community development
- Capacity building
- Advocacy and campaign work
- Knowledge building
- Organisational cultural change and development (within Oxfam)

Source: Oxfam Australia 2007: 18–20.

Most significant was the stress Oxfam placed on listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves, not something normally emphasised in the business models Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people usually experience in Australia. Equally, it was clear that the conditions for community development in Australia are very different from those in developing countries where the organisation operates. Australia is a high income country, with considerable levels of government investment, a social safety net in place and very different experience of community development compared to the situation in developing countries. For Oxfam, the challenge was to identify the gaps in this environment through which they could make a difference: they did not wish to duplicate government services or existing programs run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other NGOs, but sought a niche where their contribution could leverage change (see 'Oxfam's ways of working', above).

However, consistent with Oxfam's international work, human rights underpin the ATSIP Program, as the organisation believes that 'successive government policies have eroded the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to function effectively and practice self-determination' (Oxfam Australia 2007: 18). Oxfam establishes long-term community development partnerships with a variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and institutions, not all of which may involve funding—though many do. At the heart of these partnerships is a commitment by Oxfam to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's decision making and community control, and the aspiration to link Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with key decision-makers, reflecting the advocacy element of the One Program approach.

Oxfam emphasises capacity building—by which it means 'supporting people to develop the skills, knowledge and resources that enable them to better manage their own affairs' (Oxfam Australia 2007: 19). It aims to respond to needs the partners identify, and this support 'may include conducting workshops in areas such as media and media relations, communications, development of advocacy and lobbying strategies, community development, fundraising and event organisation, monitoring and evaluation, a human rights-based approach to development, and developing international networks' (Oxfam Australia 2007: 19). Oxfam also supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in developing their own advocacy capacities to hold governments and others to account. It tries to create such opportunities, so that Indigenous voices are strengthened and heard in public and policy debates. As one staff member stated, 'the difficulty is that we have a stable, functioning democracy, but it's not functioning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'. Oxfam complements this with research and what it calls 'knowledge building'—that is, learning from field experience and feeding that learning into future program work.

Yorgum's essence

The name 'Yorgum' chosen for the Counselling Service is a Nyoongar name for a tree which has healing properties. Aboriginal people used this tree in the treatment of numerous ailments. The name is an expression of the life sustaining image of the living tree; the deep roots, rising sap, branches reaching to the sky, the shelter given and the home provided to the many forms of life. It is a symbol of the connectedness and interdependence in the diversity of living beings. This image conveys the way counsellors need to work.

The underlying philosophy is the valuing of our diversity in different individuals, different families, language groups and people from other places who are included and respected; that human differences can be accepted as expressions of our uniqueness and capacity to survive.

Abuse can be compared to a tree with the root system being affected by some of the factors such as loss of culture, identity, low self esteem resulting from unresolved traumatic experiences.

The lack of consistent, supportive and loving relationships and the absence of positive life enhancing values is like the soil in which the tree grows. A tree is an organic system. If the whole system is diseased, you can't just treat one of the roots and expect the rest of the tree to be healthy. You must treat the whole tree as well as the soil within which it grows (Yorgum 2003: 2).

The ATSIP strategy also includes a component of organisational change within Oxfam itself, including implementing the Oxfam Reconciliation Action Plan, a focus on staff development in relation to cultural diversity, and the mentoring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

Oxfam's ATSIP Program focuses on 'Health and Wellbeing', 'Youth', and 'Self-Determination', recognising that these three areas are highly interrelated. In particular, the health and wellbeing team work to develop the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by strengthening the governance, management systems and policy work of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and other Aboriginal health organisations. (Yorgum is one of the partners with whom they work in this way.) The ATSIP Program tries to be responsive and use its limited funding in a very strategic way, although it has one very large health and community development program in the Gulf region of Queensland, which is supported by Commonwealth government-sourced funding. Aside from that project, the rest of Oxfam's Health and Wellbeing program amounts to some \$750,000 per year.

YORGUM ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation was established in Perth in 1991 and incorporated in 1993. Yorgum was established to provide a counselling service utilising an alternative and cultural approach to healing Aboriginal people, who have been affected by family violence, sexual abuse and the associated underlying causes (see 'Yorgum's essence', above). Yorgum service delivery includes a counselling service, a Link-Up service for members of the stolen generations, as well as the Oxfam-funded Community Development program.

Yorgum staff are all Aboriginal and they employ a holistic and cultural approach to address community needs, which supports the spiritual, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of clients. The service operates across the metropolitan area, although the Link-Up program extends beyond Nyoongar country to the Wheatbelt, Murchison, South West, and the Goldfields and surrounding areas. Yorgum has an all-Aboriginal Management Committee of seven people and the organisation operates according to the 'Aboriginal Terms of Reference'. This is a framework developed through the Centre for Aboriginal Studies

at Curtin University. The framework sets out a way of working which places at its core four aspects of the Aboriginal domain which interact:

- the aspirations of Indigenous people (their goals, priorities, and future directions)
- cultural elements (such as their obligations, kinship and family structures, behavioural expectations, history, spirituality, values, beliefs and heritage)
- experiences (socialisation, interaction, historical factors, feelings and current situation), and
- understandings (knowledge and practices which lead to appropriate ways of thinking and working).

The Centre for Aboriginal Studies' view is that Yorgum is a living example of these Aboriginal Terms of Reference in operation, and organises student visits there annually.

YORGUM'S HISTORY

Yorgum began in 1991 after a group of Aboriginal women working in women's refuges and services came together in 1990. They recognised the huge and unmet need for a culturally appropriate counselling service for Aboriginal people experiencing the effects of colonisation and trauma on their lives and those of their families. They were concerned that mainstream services were not working for Aboriginal people, and their problems were not being addressed. The group could see the impact of the cumulative experiences of loss and grief caused by the death of many Aboriginal youth involved in high speed police car chases as well as the high incidence of black deaths in custody. These factors created a profound sense of disempowerment for the Aboriginal community and individuals which the women wanted to address.

These factors led to the women setting up a two-year Aboriginal counselling training course in conjunction with the Wasley Centre (an independent counselling and psychotherapy centre in Perth). In 1992, while training 22 women in the first intake (including themselves), the women began providing counselling and support on a voluntary basis. This was all done with some initial Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) and ATSIC funding. In late 1992 they successfully approached ATSIC for funds for a second intake of trainees. The first group of trainees graduated in 1994, the second group in 1995.

This was a big step for the people involved, but changes in the external environment assisted in gaining a wide recognition of Aboriginal counsellors: the follow up to the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report (Commonwealth of Australia 1991), the Bringing Them Home Report (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families 1997), and the Swan Mental Health Report (Swan & Raphael 1995). The graduates from the training course provided the core of the intellectual resources for the unique Yorgum counselling approach. Between 1993 and 2003 the organisation—which became known as Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation—grew slowly, relying heavily on the work of volunteers, and cobbling together funding from Lotterywest, World Vision, and Community Aid Abroad (now Oxfam Australia). In 1997 they finally secured their first Western Australia State Government funding and began a child sexual abuse treatment service. By the year 2000 they were gaining one-off grants from other government sources, State and Commonwealth, for particular projects and activities. Then in 2001, Yorgum secured further recurrent funding from the Department for Community Development for a project 'Aboriginal Children Experiencing Family Violence'. However, in that year, the cottage they had been using was no longer available, and they moved to the Perth suburb of Northbridge.

In 2002, the Western Australia Government announced the Gordon enquiry into family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities, and Yorgum's Aboriginal consultant psychologist was invited to join the Enquiry team. By now, family violence workshops were being requested frequently from all areas of

DEET:

Department
of Education,
Employment and
Training

the State. Yorgum developed promotional materials such as pamphlets and family violence booklets, and community development workers wore many hats to support the growing demands on the service. The small house Yorgum now operated from was bursting at the seams, with sometimes two or three workers per small room and counselling sessions often carried out in the kitchen and outside under the pergola.

Since 2003, Yorgum has grown rapidly: from six staff in 2003, the number has grown to 19 by May 2009.⁴ Much of this achievement can be attributed to the leadership and management of the organisation, their passion, long-term commitment and determination, and the qualities of the staff. They have gained external credibility and, with a new building acquired in 2005, they have achieved greater stability. Yorgum has managed this rapid growth well to date, developing the necessary systems and processes for the larger organisation it has become.

THE HISTORY OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Although Oxfam Australia's partnership with Yorgum began officially in 2002, relationships between some individual Yorgum staff and Oxfam Australia existed beforehand. They go back to the early 1990s, when Oxfam Australia was known as Community Aid Abroad. In 1994 Community Aid Abroad organised for a group of Aboriginal people to undertake a study visit to India, to learn more about community development in different contexts. Yorgum's current Community Development Officer (CDO), as well as one or two former Yorgum staff, were among that group. Another former staff member was involved with Community Aid Abroad's early Aboriginal program in the Pilbara.

Oxfam and Yorgum began their current relationship in 2002, and ongoing funding from Oxfam began early in 2003, when the first CDO was employed by Yorgum, with Oxfam support, to develop the community development area of Yorgum's activities.⁵ When the first CDO resigned in late 2004, her successor (the

CDO:
Community
Development
Officer

Yorgum Family Violence Training Workshops

The aim of the Yorgum Family Violence Training Package/community development workshops is to raise awareness about family violence to Aboriginal communities, families and individuals and to develop ways of enhancing the safety of family members. This is achieved by building on the cultural strengths of the community, through activities and strategies identified by the community as relevant to them.

When delivering workshops in the Aboriginal community, Yorgum is guided by the following principles:

1. To maintain a holistic approach to healing principles, encompassing mental health, physical, cultural and spiritual well being.
2. To facilitate and continually develop the training package in response to identified needs by Aboriginal people within their communities,
3. To work within an Aboriginal terms of reference framework and ensure culturally valid understanding and information shape the provision of service in each community.
4. To ensure the human rights of Aboriginal people are recognised and respected.
5. To uphold and strengthen the aim of empowerment for the people.

Compiled from: Oxfam Community Aid Abroad n.d.; Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service n.d.: Attachment 1.

current CDO) began working with Yorgum. Later, a male worker was also employed part time to work on men's issues in the community development program. However, when he moved to a position in the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, the funding was also transferred to the Council without discussion with Yorgum.

Since 2004 Oxfam has funded three further Yorgum 'projects'. The first, a one-year project called the 'Yorgum Community Healing and Development Project' ran from July 2004–June 2005. It provided for the salary and related costs for Yorgum's CDO and a part-time support worker, as well as travel costs for outreach to other parts of the state, with the intention of continuing support for a total of three years. The second project, entitled 'Community Development Project' ran from July 2005–June 2007 and extended the same support over the next two years.

The most recent project, known by Oxfam as the 'Yorgum Community Development Program' was funded for the period July 2007–June 2009, supporting the continuation of the full-time CDO position, mentoring for her, program and activity costs and general organisational costs. The major focus of this program is provision of training workshops for community members and a range of largely non-Indigenous service providers. Activities have included a range of 'wellness circles' with grandmothers and women; advocacy and promotional work with a range of agencies and government departments; as well as the development of training materials to deliver family violence workshops for community members and service providers in metropolitan and regional areas (see 'Yorgum Family Violence Training Workshops' on previous page) (Yorgum 2008; see also Yorgum 2003).

Oxfam support has also enabled Yorgum to conduct various forums to provide a voice for Nyoongar people. Recent examples include top-up funding for the 'Building Bridges Conference' addressing the issue of child sexual abuse in communities, and the organisation of a Forum on 'The Aftermath of Trauma' with a guest speaker from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Council.

As well, Oxfam has supported additional organisational capacity development activities. This capacity development support has included: mentoring support for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (as well as the CDO mentoring mentioned above), assistance with marketing and promotion, training and mentoring for Yorgum's Finance Officer, opportunities for key staff to attend training, workshops and national or international conferences (e.g. in Canada, New Zealand, Philippines), and Yorgum staff participation in Oxfam partner gatherings. While some of this support was planned and integral to the projects, some was responsive as needs or opportunities emerged.

Oxfam's support for the CDO also leads to wider staff development and support within Yorgum, as she shares her community development approaches and the learning from training or conferences she has attended with others. An important part of her role is also conducting workshops/trainings regarding healing, family violence and other issues with new and existing Yorgum staff.

Yorgum have always called the Oxfam projects 'The Community Healing and Development Program' and seen them as one ongoing program. To articulate more clearly and to identify what Yorgum were trying to achieve on the ground through the Oxfam funded community development program, the following purpose statement was established to try to capture the picture and to guide activities undertaken (Oxfam Australia Appraisal Document 2007):

To actively encourage healing and harmony for and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians on Nyoongar Land:

- Aboriginal People will have greater support to healing and counselling services, delivered by sensitive and supportive agencies

CEO:
Chief Executive
Officer

- Aboriginal People will gain the pride, confidence, recognition of their own ability and skills needed to implement their own solutions to their own issues
- Aboriginal People will gain a greater understanding of their collective history, oppression and how it manifests, as well as the individual and collective rights of Aboriginal Australians
- Australian Government agencies will increase funding and resources to Aboriginal-led healing initiatives and organisations.

Thus although funding has been in mostly two-year 'projects', the program and partnership has been recognised by both partners as having endured for around seven years, and the flexibility Oxfam has provided has enabled Yorgum to take advantage of opportunities which arose from time to time in relation to things not foreseen when the projects were agreed. Overall, it is clear that the program and activities were determined and led by Yorgum, not Oxfam as the funder.

THE PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION

During the period of Oxfam Australia and Yorgum's partnership there has been no formal evaluation undertaken by the partners of their program or their partnership. However, Oxfam Australia believes that evaluation is an important part of learning, moving forward and growing, and being accountable to various stakeholders. Oxfam is committed to evaluations as a learning process for partner and unit staff and to ensure maximum learning, partners and staff are encouraged to be involved in such evaluation processes from the outset. Furthermore, Oxfam believes that traditional 'external' or objective evaluations often provide little insight into important aspects of partners' programs and therefore cannot produce the same quality or richness of data.

For Oxfam, a participatory evaluation is an opportunity for capacity development. This participatory evaluation illustrates in some detail an example of how Oxfam's 'partnership' and capacity development support operate in this particular instance.

In January 2009 Oxfam's health and wellbeing team visited Yorgum and discussed the need to conduct an evaluation before the end of the current funding period, as agreed in the partner working agreement. In March, a joint Yorgum-Oxfam telephone meeting occurred to begin preparations, involving Yorgum and Oxfam staff as well as the researcher. One Oxfam staff member was from the ATSIP Program and the other from the Program Development Unit, which has a capacity building/support role for the whole organisation. In early April, Oxfam staff visited Yorgum again to plan the evaluation. They discussed the approach to evaluation, including the process and the participation of various staff and stakeholders with Yorgum's CEO and CDO. Subsequently, another preparatory telephone meeting with the whole evaluation team was held on 28 April. At this meeting the evaluation Terms of Reference were finalised, following input from all members of the evaluation team, which comprised the four Yorgum and Oxfam staff mentioned above and this researcher, acting as an external consultant, as well as Yorgum's Research Officer—who was to be mentored by the external consultant, in line with the capacity development focus of the evaluation. These six women were the 'inside-outside' team who led the evaluation.

The Terms of Reference defined the purpose, scope, and approach of this evaluation, as well as the underpinning values and varying roles and responsibilities of those involved.

This was a very different approach to evaluation from any Yorgum had experienced before. Government funders had either conducted a shorter discussion and 'tick box' exercise to formally review (rather than evaluate) services Yorgum provided, or Yorgum had been involved in a detailed risk management exercise with the funder seeking access to an enormous variety of documents, particularly to ensure the governance

and program processes of the organisation were strong and posed no risk. They had never been involved in planning the terms of reference or setting the objectives of an evaluation a funder wanted to carry out.

Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to conduct a participatory review primarily on the outcomes of Yorgum's community development program funded by Oxfam Australia, the partnership between Yorgum and Oxfam, and the associated capacity building support Oxfam had provided to Yorgum. The evaluation included the following evaluation objectives which were jointly developed during March/April by Yorgum and Oxfam staff in the evaluation team:

1. To follow Yorgum's Mission Statement/Concept (maintaining the 'essence' of Yorgum) in the overall approach of the evaluation
2. To explore the partnership between Yorgum and Oxfam with a focus on Yorgum's growth over time
3. To reflect and document Yorgum's story and to feed that into future directions to ensure sustainability
4. To evaluate the strengthening of Yorgum and impact of capacity building (internally, culturally and in the community)
5. To assess the healing outcomes for Aboriginal community people considering the impacts of colonisation.
6. To evaluate government commitments to supporting Aboriginal healing initiatives.

The overall approach of the evaluation was guided by Yorgum's desire to maintain the 'essence' of Yorgum through the process. Key considerations and values underpinning the evaluation approach and methodology were identified:

- The evaluation would not take a traditional approach to assessing only program outcomes/ impact but would also emphasise documenting Yorgum's story and reflecting on the organisation's growth. Yorgum regarded this as especially important to evaluating their work.
- The evaluation would be a participatory exercise that meaningfully involved Yorgum and Oxfam staff, with an emphasis on it being a capacity development process.
- In light of this Oxfam-led participatory approach, Yorgum and Oxfam staff would be involved in planning the evaluation, in development of the key questions, throughout the interviewing stages, and during the analysis and report writing processes; learning and research training would be part of the process.
- Community members, Yorgum and Oxfam staff, and other key Yorgum stakeholders would be the primary audience for the information gathering and feedback.
- The evaluation would draw out information about partnership and programs that would be conducive to learning and useful for improving future ways of working for both Yorgum and Oxfam.
- The evaluation team and the staff working with them would be careful not to inappropriately raise the expectations of Yorgum, and/or the communities with whom Yorgum works about what Oxfam or Yorgum would be able to do in response to any issues identified through the evaluation, as resource constraints or other priorities may limit their activities.

- The evaluation would be conducted with sensitivity to Aboriginal cultural ways and processes.
- The approach of the evaluation team would be inclusive of a holistic view of healing and wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals.

The evaluation process

The evaluation itself began with a one-day workshop with Yorgum staff, some Management Committee directors and some former staff. The workshop was led by Oxfam's Program Development Unit staff member. It included a reflection on Yorgum's history and growth as well as participatory evaluation training. It involved all members of the evaluation team and *all* Yorgum staff and was viewed as a capacity building exercise for them about monitoring, evaluation and learning. Interestingly, at one point during the process, the Yorgum Management Committee Vice-Chairperson challenged the whole need for evaluation—he saw the organisation as successful because of the continuing demand for its services, and believed that being self-determining meant that a community controlled organisation should be able to determine whether it needed evaluation. This generated some discussion, though the process continued, with the suggestion that the word 'evaluation' should be dropped and the process should be called 'Yarning About Yorgum', which is how it then proceeded.

In preparation for the workshop, the CDO and others had mounted an impressive exhibition of Yorgum's organisational growth from a tiny 'seedling' to a 'mature tree'. This timeline featured photographs and other memorabilia from Yorgum's history and became the focus of a major session of the evaluation workshop, with the CDO leading the overview of Yorgum's history. As part of the workshop, staff were invited to record three events of greatest significance to them in their time at Yorgum and these were pinned onto a magnificent painting of a tree designed by one of the Yorgum staff. For some recently-recruited Yorgum staff, this session was valuable to learn about the early history of the organisation, and for everyone to appreciate the struggle of the founders to establish the organisation and nurture it to the relatively strong position it was in now.

Another important session, led by Oxfam's Program Development Unit staff member, used a 'splash-ripple' concept, with an object being dropped into a container of water to represent the logic of a program and how to evaluate it. For example it introduced terms such as 'activity' (dropping the object), output (the splash), outcome (the close-in easy-to-see ripples) and impact (the wider, lower ripples) in a simple and highly memorable way. This exercise emphasised that the further you go from the 'splash', the harder it is to evaluate what difference you have made with your activity. That is, impact is much harder to evaluate than the outputs of your activity. This exercise appeared to clarify these concepts well for participants, indicating Oxfam's use of an appropriate communication strategy to convey complex ideas and terminology.

Towards the end of the workshop, the participants worked in small groups using broad 'key questions' which Oxfam regularly use for evaluations as a guide, and generated context-specific questions for the Yorgum-Oxfam evaluation process. The five Oxfam questions that guided the process were:

- What significant changes have occurred in women's and men's, boys and girls lives, and to what extent are these likely to be sustained?
- What changes in policies, practices, ideas, beliefs and attitudes have occurred in specific institutions, groups and individuals?
- How effectively have those we seek to benefit been involved at all stages through the process?
- How effectively have we worked with others and involved them in all stages through the process?

- To what degree have we learnt from this experience and shared the learning with others and ourselves? What will we now do differently or what will we do more of?

Some of the specific questions which were generated at the Yorgum workshop and subsequently refined, included:

- What changes do you see in clients' lives, families and community through Yorgum's work?
- How well do you think Yorgum responds to the community's needs?
- Are you aware of any influences that Yorgum has had on government attitudes, policies or practices?
- How well do Yorgum's relationships with other organisations work? (Why?)
- Do you think Yorgum has become stronger over time? (If so, in what ways, and what factors have been important in contributing to the changes?)
- How well does Yorgum learn from their experiences, share their learnings and grow?

Thus Oxfam's 'standard' evaluation questions were modified and made both relevant and specific to Yorgum by the Yorgum staff themselves.

During the workshop, rich discussion and debate also led to the identification of the most appropriate methods to use to gather information, including: small focus group discussions, larger group informal discussions (e.g. Granny Group), verbal surveys/interviews (face-to-face and telephone), one-on-one in-depth interview discussions, art work and photography, story gathering, and questionnaire or survey methods.

Discussion also focused on how to monitor all the changes which clients experience, for example as a result of reunions that Yorgum organises (e.g. for residents of former homes or missions). It was suggested that standard government indicators don't show the impact, and that story telling is an important way of recording this. One staff member also suggested that reporting on the process of such events is as important as the outcome, as a huge effort is involved in bringing large family groups together: staff are often drained of energy by the end, and it is important to have ways of re-energising them. The fact that new staff gain confidence in organising a reunion is also a positive outcome which is not recognised in standard indicators. The following day, when the Link-Up staff team had a planning meeting, they developed some simple ways to monitor the results of their work, indicating that the workshop process had indeed contributed to capacity development.

The next day, the joint evaluation team selected and refined the questions for the different groups from whom information was to be gathered. Together they identified the specific questions, and selected the methodologies that were thought to be the most appropriate to gather the required information. Three methods were adopted—small group discussions, larger informal group discussions and interviews which were carried out face-to-face, over the phone and also, in one case, by email. Over the subsequent weekend, the Oxfam staff and the external consultant organised these questions, with a little more refining, into an interview schedule for the different groups.

The evaluation team identified four broad stakeholder groups from whom to gather data:

- community and clients: individuals accessing Yorgum services and their families and communities, and the Nyoongar community of south-eastern Western Australia
- Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation staff
- Oxfam Australia staff

- other partners including the Western Australian and Australian governments and other relevant NGOs and agencies with whom Yorgum works.

Many of the interviewees wore several 'hats' and did not fit neatly into a single group (such as client or staff member). However, the team interviewed them using the survey form which best reflected the perspective from which we were primarily seeking their views, recognising that they had a number of experiences of Yorgum (e.g. staff are also community members).

The evaluation team split into two-person teams (each comprising one person from Yorgum and one from Oxfam/the researcher) to conduct interviews or small group sessions with a cross section of the groups mentioned above, and to record responses. This included a regular meeting of one Granny's Group and the Kookaburra Club (a similar community gathering of women and children). A few interviews were conducted by one person, usually for logistical reasons as it was hard to fit everyone into the limited time. Responses to all the questions were typed up and collated in the four categories above, for shared analysis by the evaluation team. This was a task which the Oxfam members of the team and the researcher undertook in the evenings and/or while Yorgum staff attended to their regular work.

The last two-and-a-half days of the exercise were set aside for the team to jointly analyse the data gathered and to plan the report.⁶ This analysis was led by the Oxfam Program Development Unit staff member, referring to a framework Oxfam commonly uses, developed from a 'SWOT' analysis.⁷ This invited the team to carefully read all the collated feedback and identify the strengths which each stakeholder group had identified, and the challenges or weaknesses they had noted. Then, in terms of the agreed strengths, the analysis explored why these were strengths and what Yorgum needed to keep or continue doing to sustain them. In terms of the challenges or weaknesses, the team was asked to analyse why these were happening and what could be done to learn, address and adapt to overcome them. This analytical process helped identify the key findings and recommendations from the Yarning.

Towards the end, the team reviewed whether the evaluation had met its objectives. Yorgum staff felt that it had captured the values, principles and protocols agreed, and as Yorgum's Research Officer commented, it was not as clinical and technical as she had expected; in fact it was 'really quite a beautiful process'. However, Yorgum staff felt that this evaluation should not have been left until the end of the funding contract but undertaken mid-way through, so that lessons arising could have been incorporated into their work. They were satisfied that Yorgum's story had been documented and that everyone now had that understanding of the organisation's history, and that discussion during the analysis sessions had raised issues about how Yorgum could grow and yet ensure it sustained its 'essence'. They also agreed that the organisation had really strengthened and the internal capacity building was essential to the community impact. But they also recognised that it is very hard to assess the 'far ripples'. We all agreed that we had assessed the healing outcomes as far as we could, and our discussion was about the fact that although people still live with the impacts of colonisation, Yorgum's work is to help them move beyond that, to be strong, independent and proud of who they are. Although the team all felt it was harder to evaluate the government's commitments to healing initiatives, we recognised that things were changing—in Western Australia the Redress Scheme was offering ex-gratia payments to people who were abused in state care,⁸ the national Healing Foundation was being developed. This was a long way forward compared to a decade before, so although the team could not really *evaluate* this, we could see it happening.

Following up the Yarning

Approximately a week after the evaluation, the team met again in a telephone conference to debrief on the experience of the evaluation. This was where the sense that the evaluation had not focused as much on the community development program as had been expected was raised by Yorgum staff. This may have been because the Terms of Reference agreed had been very broad and because of the relatively short time

frame within which the evaluation was prepared and undertaken.⁹ But the Yorgum staff also felt positive that community and partners had affirmed the good job Yorgum is doing in terms of healing outcomes. At the same time they felt the evaluation could have been improved if everyone had understood more about Yorgum before it began, and particularly all the achievements of the community development program. They were enthusiastic about the value of the splash-ripple exercise and commented that the community development impact is the farthest ripple and is hard to see yet. They indicated that the findings would be fed into their strategic planning process, which was beginning shortly.

The evaluation team all recognised that the approach had a number of limitations, which the final evaluation report acknowledged. Among them, a participatory evaluation like this was a new approach for both Yorgum and the ATSIP Program staff member, and the particular Oxfam methodology was new to the researcher. Therefore evaluation team members were not always clear exactly how the evaluation process would roll out and what the outcomes might look like. This, of course, can be positive, as none of us had pre-conceived ideas. A broader organisational perspective and longer time-frame than was necessary (six years) was probably taken, and while it was desirable to look at the overall capacity/strength of Yorgum and their general healing impact, the evaluation probably did not in the end focus specifically enough on the community development program which had been the main focus of Oxfam funding. The short time frame agreed for the evaluation—with the training/preparation workshop, the collection of data and the preliminary analysis all undertaken within seven days—added some pressure, while community and Sorry Business occurring at the time impacted on staff being available. Finally, the timing of the evaluation coincided with the announcement of some key Oxfam funding decisions. Although this evaluation process did not feed into these funding decisions, the timing made it difficult to separate such decisions from the evaluation, and this had some impact at the end of the process.

YORGUM'S SUCCESS: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

The Yarning revealed that Yorgum offers an holistic and culturally appropriate healing service for Aboriginal families and communities. It also found that Yorgum's capacity had grown substantially since 2002, particularly through securing Yorgum's own premises in 2005, being successful in a submission for Link-Up Program funding (which Yorgum received in 2006), and having its national profile firmly established through featuring in the Social Justice Report and participating in a national forum in Parliament House, Canberra, in 2007. In 2008, Yorgum won an Award for Excellence from the Western Australia Health Consumers' Council for outstanding work with the Aboriginal community.

The community development work

One aspect of community development is helping to bring to the surface issues which have been unspoken or hidden in a community. Yorgum has certainly done this. It was the first agency to bring to the surface issues of child and adolescent sexual abuse in the Aboriginal community in Perth; it has also actively challenged family violence, and highlighted how abuse impacts on Aboriginal people in Perth and in various communities throughout Western Australia. Importantly, it has led such discussion from an Aboriginal perspective, and has made valuable efforts to inject Aboriginal views into discussions of these sensitive issues in the media and broader society. The many workshops and forums which Yorgum has held, or to which it has contributed—both within the Aboriginal community and with non-Indigenous services—have all progressed this debate.

Acknowledging but moving beyond cultural trauma

Yorgum's analysis of the cultural trauma which Aboriginal people have experienced since colonisation, and the continuing intergenerational impact of that trauma is clearly set out in its 'Family Violence in the Nyoongar Community' booklet, an important product of the community development program. This booklet

explains how Yorgum works with families to help them understand the causes of their circumstances, especially the impact of colonisation, allowing them to grieve their past pain, take responsibility for how to move their lives forward and relate to others around them, regain their identity, and build up their strength. The evaluation revealed that this holistic approach, which takes history into account, helps local people understand where their underlying problems come from, find solutions, and deal with issues at the local level.

Empowering groups and individuals

Yorgum's work with two community groups which the evaluation team observed (a Granny's Group and the Kookaburra Club) appeared to reflect additional aspects of community development: empowering people through helping them to see that their problems are not theirs alone—they are shared, and can be tackled together; and helping individuals take responsibility for making changes in their own lives, however hard they have been. As one participant explained, 'Yorgum helped me change my life because they made me realise I want to change it'.

Participants in one group were clear how Yorgum had helped them change their behaviour (e.g. reduce drug use), improve their relationships and communication, remain less stressed, and learn how to take on the responsibilities of parenting. Yorgum was also seen as 'being there' in a crisis if needed. The two groups also demonstrated that the community development program is closely supported by, and links with, Yorgum's Counselling and Link-Up services. As one staff member recognised, while counselling gets to the roots of many of the issues, and Link-Up heals through helping people with their identity and reunions, Yorgum's community development program gives people the tools to help them heal themselves. That is, Yorgum's approach clearly empowers people.

Yorgum is also called upon to work in communities well beyond Nyoongar country through the community development program, and over the years it has been able to respond to calls from various tribal/language groups throughout Western Australia, notably in the Pilbara, Gascoyne, Kimberley and Wheatbelt regions. Working with local organisations that arrange all the logistics, and only by invitation, Yorgum has facilitated workshops on issues such as family violence. Art therapy is often a feature of their workshop activities, as it provides a non-threatening environment in which to discuss difficult issues (e.g. a workshop with 40 CDEP participants from a community at the base of the Stirling Ranges led to some beautiful artwork). As one staff member commented, when they go out to the regions of Western Australia, people often say 'We want a Yorgum here' or 'There should be more Yorgums throughout this State.' One community person who had been involved in a large reunion which Yorgum helped facilitate reflected the positive way in which Yorgum worked with the Aboriginal community on this project. 'Working with Yorgum was great,' she said, 'It was a very professional but culturally appropriate way of working.'

Respect and a friendly environment

The evaluation certainly found that Yorgum provides a friendly, caring, trusting and safe environment for people to access for healing. They feel they are always treated with a lot of respect, something which Aboriginal people may not feel with other services. Indeed some women in a Granny's Group reported that they were 'treated like queens' at Yorgum. This reflects Yorgum's view that it is the elders who need support to help strengthen the culture, hence the respect they are accorded there. The evaluation team was told of many cases of individuals whose lives had changed as a result of their association with Yorgum.

Advocating and influencing

The Yarning also recognised various ways in which Yorgum has been part of a process of influencing governments to focus more on Aboriginal healing. In particular, just after the Yarning was undertaken,

ANTaR:

Australians for
Native Title and
Reconciliation

consultations began for a national Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Such a foundation has been sought by a number of groups over many years, and Yorgum has been part of this national effort. Yorgum's special contribution to this campaign is that it represents one successful model of Aboriginal healing that people can point to in illustrating what is needed. Yorgum has featured in national reports, such as the Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) *Success Stories* booklet and the *Social Justice Report* of 2007 and 2008 as a model of good practice (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2008, 2009; ANTaR 2007). Thus Yorgum's experience and its model of healing have been recognised nationally, and it is showing governments what holistic Aboriginal healing looks like. Yorgum has also made numerous presentations about its healing work at major national conferences, and its training resource materials and workshops assist in improving the capacity of workers in a variety of services to respond to violence and abuse in Aboriginal communities. Yorgum has provided advice to various government taskforces and departments, and clearly influences students who visit or come there on placements.

Aboriginal staff working in Aboriginal ways

Having an all-Aboriginal staff (and Management Committee) who work in Aboriginal ways is considered of paramount importance to the community. People feel that because Yorgum staff are all Aboriginal people they understand the issues families and the community face, and many commented that they felt less shame talking with Yorgum's Aboriginal staff. One woman explained that Nyoongar women open up a lot because the CDO is herself Aboriginal, and the women don't have to explain the issues to her over and over again—she understands them. Another said that she'd seen children come in who wouldn't speak to anyone, but once they realise the counsellors are Nyoongar, all the barriers drop.

Capacity development

Oxfam's capacity development support has been highly valued. Some early marketing and promotion support influenced Yorgum's consistent style and logo for its stationery, name cards, and publications, and was a factor in its decision to develop a website, all in order to promote itself more effectively. The support to the Finance Officer, which has involved providing a local trainer/mentor, has been extremely important in enabling Yorgum to manage increased funding from government sources such as Counselling and Link-Up. This stabilised the organisation and enabled it to cope with the programs which it had developed. In late 2002, Yorgum's income was only \$190,000. Today, the trained Finance Officer manages a budget of \$1.6 million, many more assets (e.g. vehicles, computers) and staff payroll very successfully. The Finance Officer has undertaken some TAFE courses and had on-the-job training to enable her to shift from a part-time receptionist position to full-time Finance Officer. Now, her mentor simply checks her quarterly financial reports and assists her as required.

The mentoring and coaching support to the CEO and the CDO are also valued, as strengthening these staffing roles is seen as integral to strengthening the overall organisation. The mentoring has been very regular with the CEO, and more intensive with the CDO in helping finalise the *Yorgum Trainer's Guide*. This process of documenting the Yorgum training approach was seen as an important part of organisational strengthening. For the CEO, discussions with the mentor have largely been to help her to take a more strategic role as the organisation has grown, and to have someone with whom she can confidentially discuss difficult issues. Such mentoring support, an Oxfam staff member indicated, was put in place to help these two key Yorgum staff manage the stresses they faced in their work, and it seemed to be helping.

The mentor who works with these two staff believes that such on-the-job mentoring/coaching support could be of value for the other two team leaders in Yorgum (they are now receiving mentoring from other

consultants); she believes that supporting the staff is critical to Yorgum's success. Support for managers in their management role is also important. Certainly, the staff interviewed indicated that they feel valued, respected and well supported at Yorgum. The organisation looks after its staff, supporting them personally as they carry out their long-term work of helping people heal. Given the demanding nature of their work, it is clearly vital that time and attention remains focused on such support to the staff themselves. They are regularly dealing with difficult issues, and need time to debrief and share experiences confidentially if they are to sustain their work over the long term.

The strength of the organisation depends to a very high degree on the ability of Yorgum to attract and retain highly skilled staff. Many people the team 'yarned with' commented on the high calibre and professionalism of Yorgum staff. However, as Aboriginal people, it was also recognised that staff too have to maintain their own healing. Despite their considerable organisational growth, Yorgum is still dealing with big and complex issues with limited resources. And although limited by particular funding requirements, Yorgum still manages to meet holistic community needs.

THE PARTNERSHIP

The evaluation revealed that Yorgum has valued the partnership with Oxfam, especially its ability to be flexible and respond to Yorgum's needs as the organisation has grown. Likewise, Oxfam has gained from the partnership with Yorgum. Yorgum has contributed to Oxfam's Close The Gap campaign, and staff have given talks to donors and contributed to other Oxfam fundraising and promotion activities. And clearly Yorgum staff have contributed to Oxfam's learning about working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. However, partnership is not always easy, and this partnership has not always been plain sailing. There have been challenges in maintaining the relationship with adequate communication and clarity around expectations, particularly as Oxfam has undergone significant growth and change, which has been accompanied by high staff turnover in the ATSIP Program unit.

Some of the best features of the partnership from Yorgum's point of view are:

- that Oxfam funding gives Yorgum the opportunity to 'work outside the square' in a way government funding can't. One former staff member commented that working in partnership with Oxfam was 'vastly different' from working with government; in particular the philosophical position of Oxfam was not assimilationist, and unlike government, Oxfam recognised skills individuals have which may not be reflected in tertiary qualifications
- the professional development, training and mentoring provided: Oxfam supported training of the Finance Officer, a range of professional development opportunities for the CDO through attending conferences, leadership training etc, and mentoring support to the CEO
- the flexibility of the support for activities which may not be part of the original workplan, or for things which demonstrate an understanding of Aboriginal circumstances.

These are all highly valued aspects of the partnership which have helped Yorgum build its capacity. In the early years, the mutual learning that occurred and the ability of Oxfam (then Community Aid Abroad) to understand the daily challenges of a small community organisation were also valued. As one former staff member said, 'they allowed us to develop like a wobbly bicycle', and the partnership with Oxfam gave Yorgum some credibility in others' eyes.

Oxfam staff had a good understanding of Yorgum's approach, and from their perspective, the value of the partnership included that:

- Yorgum is a positive example of a successful Aboriginal healing organisation for Oxfam to point to in its advocacy; they have also broadened Oxfam's health portfolio—which is about health *and wellbeing*
- Yorgum has contributed to Oxfam's advocacy efforts, such as the Close The Gap campaign on health equality, Oxfam campaign staff see Yorgum staff as very friendly, open and helpful, noting that even though they are busy they make time for Oxfam needs
- Yorgum has helped with Oxfam's promotion; for example, the Granny Groups were promoted through 'Oxfam Unwrapped' (a fundraising strategy), the Yorgum website is linked to Oxfam's, Yorgum's work has featured in Oxfam newsletters, Annual reports and donor reports, and Yorgum staff have spoken at Oxfam donor events
- the long personal relationships which the CEO and CDO have built with Oxfam are appreciated and they have made valued contributions at the annual partner reflections
- there has been an openness and honesty in the partnership, based on mutual respect.

There also remain further opportunities for Yorgum and Oxfam to advance their shared concerns about Aboriginal issues together. As one former Yorgum staff member commented, many of the issues facing the Aboriginal community can only be advanced at a high level in government, and this is something which senior managers in Oxfam, lobbying in partnership with Yorgum, can address. Whilst there have been some opportunities taken up in Canberra, perhaps more opportunities could and should be created, particularly in Western Australia, for joint, senior representations on key issues. However, it should be noted that Yorgum is undertaking lobbying in Western Australia itself.

However, there have been some challenges in the partnership, which are recognised and acknowledged by both partners and these are associated largely with relationships, communication, assumptions and expectations.

Relationships

Relationships are very dependent on people. One of the underlying issues has been staff changes in Oxfam's ATSIP Program Unit since 2006. Between 2002 and 2006, the partnership was perceived by both Oxfam and Yorgum to be going well—there was good communication and considerable 'on the ground' support. The two organisations believed they had some commonality of views about community empowerment, a rights-based approach to development, and the importance of culture and cultural identity as a strong aspect of development, although they may have struggled to articulate together what strategies and approaches might look like in practice. Oxfam's staff member responsible for the work with Yorgum was perceived by Yorgum staff to have a real understanding of what they were trying to do on the ground.

However, in 2006, staff changes began, and in three years there have been four different staff members acting as the key contact person within Oxfam for Yorgum. This also occurred at a time when ATSIP grew, the staff had larger portfolios to manage, and the Close The Gap campaign was getting some priority—leaving less time for ATSIP Program staff to engage with each partner. Some of these staff may also have been inexperienced in working with Aboriginal organisations, and hence less confident to work as frankly as they might otherwise have been. This has clearly contributed to a weakening of the relationship and a reduction in communication until early 2009, when talks about this evaluation began.¹⁰ By this time, the 'partnership' was viewed by Yorgum as little more than a funding relationship, albeit a highly valued one.

Communication

Other difficulties have been the geographical distance between Oxfam (based in Melbourne) and Yorgum (in Perth) and the cost of visits, which has reduced the face-to-face contact between Yorgum and Oxfam staff; and also the tendency in Oxfam to use email for communication rather than the phone. However, another factor which may have created some misunderstanding is that the current Oxfam Health and Wellbeing Coordinator judged early on that Yorgum was stronger and required far less of her time than one of Oxfam's other major Western Australia partners in Perth, the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia. Thus she consciously devoted less time to Yorgum, but the reason may not have been communicated to Yorgum. Likewise, a much earlier decision by Oxfam when a male staff member left Yorgum to relocate funds for his men's program—without clearly explaining the reason to Yorgum—was also unfortunate. Perhaps Oxfam was operating on unstated assumptions about Yorgum which Yorgum did not share in these instances.

Not all of the challenges were related to the consequences of this staffing turnover or were entirely of Oxfam's making. Communication and relationships are always two-way affairs, and Yorgum seemed unable to overcome the communication challenges with Oxfam. One issue related to reporting. Expectations seemed to be unclear, despite genuine efforts by staff in both organisations to clarify them. Yorgum remained unclear about precisely what Oxfam was looking for in its narrative reporting. The issue seemed to be that Yorgum's reporting focuses predominantly on activities undertaken, while Oxfam would like to know more about the outcomes or impact of these activities through reports. As one Oxfam staff member noted, Oxfam needs to take a capacity development role in this regard and work with Yorgum staff on how to assess and measure outcomes in this type of work, so that their reporting can better meet Oxfam's needs. Perhaps the participatory evaluation has itself assisted in this regard.

Shared principles

Nevertheless there remain strongly shared principles underlying this partnership, although the strategies for implementing them may not have been discussed much recently. Oxfam and Yorgum both believe that community development work in Aboriginal communities is most effective and appropriate when undertaken by Aboriginal people themselves; they also both have a commitment to Aboriginal community control, Aboriginal decision-making and the promotion of human rights. Early on in the partnership, at an Oxfam partners' meeting, Aboriginal people were unhappy about a non-Indigenous community development 'expert' telling them how to do community development in Aboriginal communities. Today, Oxfam has no single approach to community development and supports many different approaches among its partners. However, it is probably true that neither Oxfam nor Yorgum have adequately discussed with each other strategies and approaches for community development in an Aboriginal setting in recent years. In fact, Yorgum has noticed a shift within Oxfam from a focus on community development to one relating to organisational capacity development.

Indeed, Yorgum and Oxfam have not regularly monitored or evaluated their work and reflected together on an ongoing basis—this evaluation is the first significant exercise of joint evaluation and review for this partnership. In the meantime, Yorgum sensed Oxfam was making judgements about them, rather than the two organisations making a shared assessment of their work.

Thus, while it has been a beneficial partnership in many ways for both organisations, in recent years, the quality of the partnership has not been as strong as it was in the earlier period. The close interaction between Yorgum and Oxfam leading up to and in the evaluation process began to turn this around, and a high degree of trust, openness and honesty was evident throughout the process of the evaluation. It was unfortunate that the two Oxfam staff who undertook the evaluation were leaving their positions soon after.

Questions of funding and 'exit'

However, as the evaluation came to an end, and for entirely unrelated reasons (to do with growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander demand for Oxfam support and reduced income due to the global financial crisis), Oxfam indicated to Yorgum that it would not be able to continue funding at the same level in the coming financial year. With a large cut in funding possible, the partnership looked decidedly rocky. Although the CEO was aware that Oxfam might withdraw or reduce its funding at some point, and discussions about planning an Oxfam 'exit' strategy were flagged in the 2007 funding agreement, it seems nothing really happened. Yorgum was upset at the relatively short notice of the proposed funding cut (it was then just one month from the beginning of the new financial year) and the Oxfam staff involved in the evaluation, neither of whom were involved in this decision making, were in a difficult situation.

Over subsequent weeks, Yorgum was persuaded to nevertheless prepare a submission to Oxfam for a further year's funding, and Oxfam was persuaded to make the funding reduction as minimal as it could manage, and to assist Yorgum to seek the difference (compared to the previous year) from other sources. This is now occurring, but the important lesson about partnership is that the 'exit' strategy needs to be well planned (as appears to have been the case in Oxfam's withdrawal from a country program in Central America). Clearly, an INGO like Oxfam will seek to withdraw its funding at some point, since it faces many calls on its limited funds, but the key issue is that by providing support in capacity building to assist Yorgum to build an organisation up, as Oxfam has done, it needs to work with Yorgum to ensure a smooth transition to other sources of funds to sustain the achievements. In this case, although 'exit' had been discussed from time to time, planning for it was never made concrete before other circumstances precipitated the situation. As one Oxfam staff member commented, the budget squeeze was very, very hard on partnerships: all Oxfam's planning to date had been in a growth situation, and it had not foreseen the downturn. During the growth period it had been actively encouraging new partners, and word was spreading about Oxfam as a partner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. As a result demand was building rapidly. The organisation was caught out when funding reduced suddenly, and this impacted on Yorgum.

REFLECTIONS

The research set out to explore how INGOs working with Indigenous communities and community organisations reflected the community development approaches which both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector and the INGO sector favour, and to understand more about the 'partnerships' between them. This case study has revealed some valuable insights into these questions.

Different context, common principles

Oxfam recognises that it cannot simply transfer its enormous experience of community development in developing countries into its programs with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The circumstances and the issues are different, so the approaches have to differ. However, it has taken some important principles which apply across its program and used them to shape its response to the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context.

The Oxfam emphasis on a rights-based approach, and in particular its support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self determination, mean that it tries to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision making and control through its partnerships. Rather than becoming involved in the detail of how Yorgum runs its program, it supports Yorgum to develop as an organisation based on its own assessment of the community context and needs, and its own skills and knowledge of how to respond effectively with solutions that are likely to be sustainable and effective. In this way it has supported and strengthened an Aboriginal-driven program and organisational development. This is an asset-based approach to community

development and, as one Oxfam staff member said, although often things in Indigenous affairs look hopeless, in fact the expertise and skills are there and Oxfam is helping to build on them.¹¹ This contrasts with the deficit approach—in which the shortcomings or weaknesses of Aboriginal organisations are the focus of attention and often 'micro-managed'.

Aboriginal approach

Yorgum is totally Aboriginal run: the staff and Management Committee are all Aboriginal. It operates according to the Aboriginal Terms of Reference, taking Aboriginal peoples' aspirations, cultural context and history, experiences, and understandings into account in the way that it works. Working in this way gives respect to its community clients and empowers them to find their own solutions to their problems and circumstances. The respectful and culturally appropriate way in which Yorgum works with people is critical to its healing success, and Oxfam has supported that.

Capacity development support

At the same time, Oxfam has offered capacity development in a variety of ways to enable the organisation to grow and handle more complex organisational issues and to increase its impact through developing a stronger national profile. Oxfam support has facilitated staff mentoring, training, international and national conference experiences. These have contributed to the way Yorgum has been able to manage its growth and share its ideas and experiences with a wider audience, including to have national political impact as one model of an holistic Aboriginal healing organisation. Support for linkages with international visitors has enabled Yorgum to facilitate the sharing of international experience of healing with Australian governments and others. The evaluation itself has supported and strengthened the capacity of Yorgum in terms of its own ability to consider and assess the impact of the 'splash' and 'ripples' of its work in the future.

Relationships are all-important

The partnership has been valuable to both organisations, and was at its strongest when relationships between Oxfam and Yorgum staff were consistent over several years, with the Oxfam person developing a strong knowledge of Yorgum's work on the ground, and having close communication. It became weaker as personnel changed frequently, and time spent on nurturing the relationship, particularly through phone calls and personal visits, reduced under pressure of time and resources at Oxfam. Yorgum would prefer a regular contact person to relate to at Oxfam, who understands Yorgum and its ways of working, and can be contacted on a needs basis. However, over the years the relationship between Oxfam and Yorgum has been a robust and relatively frank one, and remains largely so, despite the funding difficulties of the last few months and the uncertainty this created for Yorgum.

Cross-cultural communication is challenging

Related to this, the evaluation and research revealed how difficult genuine cross-cultural communication is—there remain challenges for Oxfam and Yorgum in communicating really well with each other, and this is very evident in the area of reporting. It also affirmed that cross cultural awareness and knowledge is important across *all* areas of Oxfam working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the marketing and fundraising staff. In relation to reporting, from Yorgum's perspective the very fact that people attended Yorgum activities, returned or encouraged others to come, and that Yorgum's services were in constant demand was confirmation enough that Yorgum was doing something of value for its community and individual clients. This is why reporting of activities was the emphasis. On the other hand Oxfam is interested in outcomes and impacts, in these difficult-to-measure areas of healing or strengthening cultural identity. While Yorgum could explain the 'splash' it made, it found it hard to

articulate in western ways the collective ripples created. Staff could story-tell about the changes in the lives of individuals, within the bounds of privacy and respect for clients, but tracing the combined impact of all the small ripples of their work was extremely difficult.

To summarise, the factors in the success of the partnership appear to be:

- the length of time it has lasted (around seven years)
- flexibility in terms of the way Yorgum could use the Oxfam funding
- strong personal relationships between staff of the two organisations in the early years
- some shared basic principles and foundations
- based on respect for Aboriginal control and decision-making, and priorities set by Aboriginal people
- in a policy framework of human rights and self-determination
- supporting a way of working known as the 'Aboriginal Terms of Reference'—that is, acknowledging and building on culture, history, Aboriginal aspirations and understandings
- using an asset-based development approach, which built on and helped develop the capacities of the Aboriginal people and organisation
- capacity development support which was targeted and specific to the needs of the organisation and its key staff
- linking program support, advocacy and networking for greater program impact nationally
- a relatively frank relationship.

Some of the challenges have been:

- the Australian context, which differs from developing countries
- difficulties in cross cultural communication
- a sense on Yorgum's part that the relationship was not completely frank (especially in regard to funding)
- maintaining the relationship through considerable Oxfam ATSIP Program growth and staff turnover
- gaining and fulfilling an agreed understanding of the reporting requirements
- managing Oxfam's 'exit' strategy.

CASE STUDY 2

THE PARTNERS:

CARITAS AUSTRALIA AND CENTACARE WILCANNIA-FORBES

Caritas Australia is a non-government, not-for-profit INGO based in Sydney and working in over 35 countries around the world. Working under the auspices of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of Australia, it began in 1964 as the Catholic Overseas Relief Committee, and became Caritas Australia in 1995. It is part of a large global federation of 162 Catholic agencies, known as Caritas Internationalis. Its focus is on long-term community development in some of the poorest parts of the world, but it also works in disaster response and aims to change attitudes towards global justice and development in Australia through community education. Most of its funds are raised from individual donations to its major annual fundraising drive 'Project Compassion', and from direct mail fundraising.

Caritas Australia's Guiding Principles

Preferential Option for the Poor

Caritas Australia will work with communities who experience poverty, injustice, hunger and oppression regardless of their religious, political or cultural beliefs.

Human Dignity

Caritas Australia will work with communities in ways that respect, enhance and build their human dignity, empowering them to be authentic agents of change in their own lives, families, communities and societies.

Solidarity

Caritas Australia will work with international, Australian Indigenous and all other partners in a spirit of mutual respect, transparency and integrity so that walls of hatred and prejudice, division and oppression will be transformed, so that a better future is built for the world's poorest people, and where the common good of all people is promoted.

Subsidiarity

Caritas Australia will work within the structures of the Catholic community and of the local community, both internationally and within Australia. This will enable swift and culturally appropriate responses to need. Caritas Australia's decision-making processes will engage those affected by decisions and policies and reflect transparency and accountability.

Stewardship of the Earth's Resources

Caritas Australia will work for the integrity of creation in ways which assist the world's poorest communities to have access to a greater share of resources, encouraging sustainability and equity, and respect for the environment.

Source: Caritas Australia 2010: Our Guiding Principles.

Caritas Australia sees its mission as working towards

a world that God desires to be just and compassionate. Caritas works for the freedom of those who are oppressed by injustice, bringing 'sight' to both those who are powerless and powerful and proclaiming to the poor the good news of their human dignity (Caritas Australia 2010: Our mandate).

CARITAS AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Caritas Australia's approach to development is based on Catholic social teaching, and particularly emphasises the human dignity of each person and what it calls 'integral human development'. As it says,

Caritas believes that the weak and oppressed are not objects of pity, but agents of change leading the struggle to eradicate dehumanising poverty, unacceptable living and working conditions, and unjust social, political, economic and cultural structures (Caritas Australia 2010: Our network).

Human development for Caritas is not simply about meeting physical needs but encompasses the development of the whole person, including their cultural, spiritual, social and economic needs, and the integrity and sustainability of the environment on which they depend. It is a very holistic concept, which clearly views people as the subjects of their own development rather than the objects of programs.

Caritas Australia has set out five guiding principles which underpin its global work (see 'Caritas Australia's Guiding Principles' on previous page). Its implementation of programs reflecting these principles involves Caritas Australia in providing a diverse range of programmes in areas such as water and sanitation, education, literacy, women's empowerment, income generation and sustainable agriculture, all with a strong emphasis on encouraging self-reliance.

Another feature of the Caritas approach is its idea of partnership, which emphasises local autonomy and the empowerment of local people. To work successfully in partnership, Caritas looks to work with organisations that share a similar vision or ethos to its own although they do not have to agree with the tenets of the Catholic Church; some are secular organisations whose values broadly accord with those of Caritas as far as human development is concerned.

Normally, a major local partner is the Caritas organisation in a developing country, although Caritas Australia may also work with other organisations in a country or region. It actively seeks partners that have a good reputation in their locality, are respected by their local communities, and have some understanding of, or a desire to build their capacity in, community development approaches. Caritas Australia encourages partners to use highly participatory approaches in their community development work.

In long-term development programs, it is generally expected that partners will go through a series of participative exercises to identify the root causes of the development problems in particular localities, and identify the issues which need to be addressed. Strong efforts are made to make sure that the 'poorest of the poor' are engaged in these conversations, in order to reach particular sub-groups often excluded (e.g. the aged, those with disabilities, particular minorities).

Partnership for Caritas Australia implies having a long-term vision, with both organisations in the partnership striving to inform each other's strategies. Any decisions made by Caritas are meant to be responsive to the needs expressed by the partner overseas. Whilst there may be issues or concerns raised by staff in Australia, and decisions may not be made until these have been explored, Caritas is very conscious of the power dynamics in any funding partnership and tries to constrain itself to enable the developing country partner to drive the development decisions. Thus Caritas emphasises 'subsidiarity' in decision making—that is, the actor closest to where the impact of a decision will be should be the decision maker on any issue.

However, staff recognise that this is not all easy to do. Trying to achieve real mutuality in the partnership is sometimes difficult, and they appreciate that not all partnerships are equal. One issue relates to reporting.

If Caritas does not get reports or only receives rather poor reporting, the staff realise that this does not necessarily mean that the work the organisation is doing on the ground is poor. It may mean that writing a report in English is not an easy or even culturally 'usual' thing to do. One solution Caritas has instituted is to have staff appointed in countries as 'accompaniers' who act as advisors, mentors, and capacity builders to the partners in that region. These people are not involved in the day-to-day operations of programs, but are there to build the partnership relationships, to 'walk together' with the partners and build their capacity in formal and informal ways.¹²

Caritas also emphasises responsiveness to the situation of the partners and was able to cite several instances when it had responded adaptively to the needs of partners facing particular difficulties.¹³ Through these partnerships, Caritas aims to work with the poorest of the world's poor—a challenging goal. Working with the most marginalised people in any society is extremely difficult, and at present Caritas is challenging itself to reflect on whether it is really doing this successfully, and to provide staff training to support this effort.

Furthermore, much of Caritas Australia's international work takes place in areas where conflict exists or has recently been formally ended. It places high priority on peace-building, but again it is currently trying to evaluate its strategies in this area, to discover what's really working or not when it tries to bring people together across rifts in very divided societies.

Caritas also undertakes advocacy and education in Australia and internationally. From its work at grassroots levels Caritas identifies issues which it can analyse and act on at national and international levels, although always in consultation with local partners. This includes educating Australians about the situation of this country's Indigenous people and promoting reconciliation through schools, adult education activities, and incorporating Indigenous Australian issues into newsletters, DVDs, the website and other promotion and information activities.

CARITAS AUSTRALIA IN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA

The guiding principles of Caritas' international work apply equally to its work in Indigenous Australia. While the International Program Manager recognised some variation between the way Caritas works internationally and how it works in Indigenous Australia, she saw more commonalities than differences. For example, she saw similarities in the way many governments approach their work, not utilising participatory or consultative approaches either here or internationally. The same issues were noted in relation to the level of partners' capacities to analyse, plan, monitor and capture the lessons of that monitoring, and the challenges of gathering baseline information and tracking programs for impact. She observed a high turnover in partner organisation staff as something common to fragile communities, noting that the reasons are often income or family-related.¹⁴

The International Program Manager surmised that in some parts of Indigenous Australia there may be greater opportunity to exploit natural resources for livelihood than in parts of Asia, but the big difference she saw was in the linkages Caritas Australia's Indigenous partners have with the private sector or the government, and she indicated that Caritas was trying to build models of linkage with these sectors for wider application. She also recognised the major part that government plays generally in Indigenous Australia.

The Group Manager of Indigenous Programs emphasised the difference in political context: in Australia, the dominant culture is very different to Indigenous cultures, and this makes a big difference to the relationships between INGOs and Indigenous people. The Indigenous staff member working in Caritas' Indigenous Australia program, who has had some exposure to Caritas' work in southern Africa, also stresses the contextual differences, rather than the principles or approaches. He stresses that the context varies across the country, so whilst there are some common national aspects, each location has its own

history and its own contextual specificities which need to be understood. He notes that one of the key factors in remote areas is the presence of community welfare in the form of CDEP, which may in some ways undermine the processes of community development.¹⁵

The Group Manager of Indigenous Programs emphasises the way Indigenous partner's relationships with Caritas can be shaped by their prior experiences with governments. Considerable work may be required to enable them to build real trust with Caritas and to appreciate that Caritas has a different approach when it provides funds to an organisation (e.g. monitoring is not about 'checking up on them' as some partners may expect). Rather, the relationship is about sharing experiences, mutual learning and capacity building from the program's implementation. He realises that this trust-building takes time, and depends on establishing good personal relationships between Caritas staff and the people working in the partner organisations.

The Group Manager of Indigenous Programs stresses the strengths-based approach Caritas uses and their flexibility in working with partners, particularly to support and help them if not all objectives are achieved for various reasons. As he says, for some people, the Caritas funds may be the first chance they've had to take control of their own development and it is important to be patient and support them because they have to be accountable to their communities for the outcomes. For example, when reports are received it's important to read them and consider what Caritas needs to do; this may include opportunities for Caritas itself to learn or to support the partner through some advocacy.

One further important point the Group Manager mentions is that the key outcome Caritas is seeking is capacity development of people to further their own development. If 10 young people benefit from a project which enables them to take contemporary leadership roles within their community and sustain that leadership and development work, the broader community will benefit in the longer term. For Caritas, whilst the short-term project outcomes are not insignificant, the most important outcome is building that longer-term capacity to sustain community development.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIGENOUS PROGRAM

Caritas Australia began projects in Indigenous Australia in 1973, but this work developed to a new level in the mid 1990s as a result of growing pressure from Indigenous leaders within the Catholic Church and an awareness within the organisation that it had a more significant role to play within Australia. The Indigenous Program's overall aim is to work in solidarity with organisations and communities within Australia to 'pursue justice and help those suffering from poverty and disadvantage' (Caritas 2008: 1).

In 1997 Caritas established an Indigenous Reference Group, comprising a small group of Indigenous Australians associated with the Catholic Church, to provide advice about the funding of projects and to guide Caritas Australia on Indigenous issues. This group worked in this advisory role until 2006, when Caritas Australia made changes to the way that it received advice from Indigenous Australians for its Australian Indigenous Program. This was a considerable disappointment to the Indigenous members of the reference group.¹⁶ Caritas argued that rather than appraising projects from written project proposals, which had been a large part of the Indigenous Reference Group's role, in future Caritas staff would spend more time in the field and appraise projects and the capacity of partners on the ground—while also seeking input and advice from a range of Indigenous people, including former members of the Indigenous Reference Group with expertise specifically relevant to each individual project. It argued that this was more in line with how the rest of the agency worked.

Since 1997, the Australian Indigenous Program has developed considerably, based on the theme of 'Fostering Indigenous Identity and Spirituality'. This theme arose from consultations held at that time with a wide range of Indigenous Australians which revealed that they viewed loss of identity as a key problem.

This primary theme continued to shape the program until 2008. While 'fostering Indigenous identity' remains important, it is now considered too broad a theme to give adequate guidance as to priorities.

Over time, the program has also developed from various one-off small projects to a number of longer-term program partnerships in areas of significance, such as health, youth leadership development, financial management and economic development, each related to the theme. For example, by 2002-03 the Australian Indigenous Program was funding 14 mostly short-term projects, with a total expenditure of \$195,354. During this year the program was independently reviewed. As a result of the review, the strategic plan for the Program during the years 2003-05 sought more multi-year projects and the development of partnerships, and this approach continues today. A subsequent review in 2005 endorsed this approach and, like the previous review, recommended that the program budget should remain above 5 per cent of the total development budget of the agency, a level it has sustained.

While the Program has grown significantly since the outset, the partnerships established earlier have been retained and developed over many years. By 2007-08 the total program expenditure had more than quadrupled to \$930,579: it now amounts to approximately \$1 million per year, yet supports approximately the same number of partners as before, indicating that programs have become larger and partnerships are now much longer-term relationships.

For Caritas' Indigenous Australia Program, engaging in a partnership means more than just providing the funds. It implies working with projects that are 'primarily developed and implemented by Indigenous Australians and which therefore reflect an Indigenous view of the world' (Caritas 2008: 1). It involves taking a personal interest in the work of the Indigenous organisation and being involved with how it develops. It usually includes annual monitoring visits which provide a chance to see what's working and where improvements could be made; it also means taking partner's reports seriously and providing feedback to them. 'Partnership', according to Caritas' staff, means development of a real relationship, building trust and being as transparent as possible.

It may be worth commenting on the 'organic' approach to planning and project management, since Caritas is very deliberately adopting this method rather than the 'management by objectives' approach more commonly used. In essence, it is Caritas' view that 'management by objectives' approaches, are adequate for small scale, simple projects where strong analysis has been possible enabling very detailed planning and resource allocation. However this approach cannot deal adequately with complex situations where change is non-linear, involves many actors, and where the detailed analysis of the problem and the context in depth would require heavy resourcing before a project commences. These are the types of situations in which Caritas' Indigenous Program operates.

The 'organic' (or systems) approach places the change or impact sought at the centre of the process, and the planning involves ensuring that all concerned extremely clear about what the change will look like. This enables the managers to focus on what they can do to achieve that change, recognising that they will not have control over all factors. It involves identifying 'all the areas of change and influence that are required', trying to influence them, and monitoring and analysing progress. Thus planning involves identifying the domains or areas of change that are needed. This is a more dynamic approach to planning, which assumes a high level of ability to assess the complexities of a situation and to utilise opportunities that may arise to achieve the desired impact. It works best in long-term approaches where the partners have a clear shared view of where they are heading, where the contributions of others are recognised, and where there is space to review progress (or failure) and adjust plans in response. The process requires people to gain a progressive understanding of what is driving change in any situation and to capitalise on that (Caritas n.d.) Caritas Australia's project proposal form and related documents are designed using this approach to planning; they invite proponents to identify the key change areas that are needed to bring about the desired impact and what activities they plan to undertake in these different change areas.

The Caritas Indigenous Strategy

Caritas' strategy document sets out some key points about how the organisation works:

Focus on long term, community development projects—the strategy notes that this is a change from earlier practice and more in line with Caritas' international development experience; Caritas particularly supports innovative projects which are considered too high-risk to attract government funds; with Caritas funds, a successful model can be developed which may then attract funding from other sources.

Focus on reaching the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised—Caritas acknowledges that until now, little analysis has been undertaken to explore the application of this requirement in Indigenous Australia, and they are instituting some changes to their processes to gather better information on whether and how they are doing this.

Development of key partnerships—Caritas sees 'an ideal partnership as one which will benefit and strengthen both organisations where there is an understanding of equality and mutual respect and benefit' (Caritas 2008: 6). The strategy sets out to develop more formal, long-term partnership agreements with its collaborator organisations, and to engage in conversations with governments and corporates about more innovative ways of funding, possibly with Caritas as a facilitator of such funding.

Flexibility in program design—Caritas is starting to use an approach known as the 'organic' approach to project design, in contrast to the log-frame approach (or management by objectives) which is very common in international development and government organisations.

Advocacy—Caritas is supporting partners in their advocacy, including supporting partners whose focus is advocacy, particularly in areas relating to reconciliation, climate change and wellbeing.

Source: Caritas 2008.

The Australian Indigenous Program Strategy for 2008–2011 recognises that although governments and corporate Australia make funds available to Indigenous Australians, these can be difficult to access and may be quite short-term (Caritas 2008). However, Caritas is keen to assist Indigenous groups to document and promote their successful approaches with a view to accessing other funding support. As mentioned earlier, the themes which underpin the 2008–2011 Strategy have changed, in part reflecting Caritas' wider organisational priorities. They cover well-being (health), peace building (especially relating to community violence), development of employment opportunities, and the impact of climate change (the last especially in the Torres Strait Islands). Leadership development is seen as important and should be embedded within the projects wherever possible (see 'The Caritas Indigenous Strategy', above). The key regions in which the organisation is working are the Kimberley, Northern Territory, western New South Wales and the Torres Strait Islands. The partner organisation which is the subject of this study is located in the western New South Wales region.

CENTACARE WILCANNIA-FORBES

CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes is the welfare agency of the Catholic Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes. The Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes covers a vast area (52%) of New South Wales and includes many rural and remote communities of outback New South Wales. This region has experienced severe drought for many years, and 65% per cent of the region CentaCare serves is classified by Vinson (2007) as disadvantaged,

with another 15 per cent having a degree of disadvantage. Most of the communities are isolated with very little or no public transport, and low internet access; people have low incomes, and low levels of education—over one-third have not achieved a Year 10 certificate. There are many social issues evident including teenage pregnancy, high levels of domestic violence, prison admission, and intergenerational unemployment. To serve this vast region, CentaCare has four branches: Barwon/Darling, based in Bourke; Lachlan, based in Forbes, Macquarie/Barwon, based in Narromine; and Far West, based in Broken Hill.

Data on the Aboriginal population of the region is available from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (2006a, 2006b) *Two Ways Together* regional reports of the Mid-Western NSW and the Murdi Paaki regions, which together cover a region roughly equivalent to that served by CentaCare. These indicate that the total Aboriginal population of 21,161 (6% and 15% of the total population of the two regions respectively) is very young, with around 60 per cent under 25 years old. The Aboriginal population is also highly disadvantaged, with poor health (including low birth weight babies, high rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease), low levels of education, high rates of unemployment (particularly taking account of the fact that since these reports were written CDEP has been abolished in New South Wales; in some places unemployment reaches around 40%), high rates of domestic violence, and other social problems.

While some improvements were occurring in the Murdi Paaki Region—which has strong networks of Indigenous governance and was the site of the relatively successful Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trial—the situation of Indigenous people in both regions is markedly worse than that of the general population. Dubbo, the most significant regional centre to the Diocese, has a large number of Aboriginal people (3,400) and is viewed as a 'hot spot' by the Department of Juvenile Justice in terms of the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in the justice system.

While CentaCare is not itself an Indigenous agency, it has made significant effort to serve and engage with the Aboriginal population of the region in which it works. It is the only non-government service provider

COAG:
Council of
Australian
Governments

Mission and vision: CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes

Our Mission is to empower individuals, families and communities in Western NSW by enhancing social and emotional well-being and strengthening networks of support.

Our Vision

CentaCare has a vision of communities imbued with a spirit of justice, where there is tangible respect for:

- The sacredness of all creation
- The dignity of each person
- The inherent right of all to participate fully in our co-creative mission

Our Values

- Respect for the dignity of human life
- Equality and justice for all
- Interdependence and community
- Excellence, innovation and leadership

Source: CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes 2008: 3.

in many towns in the Diocese, and over the years it has worked hard to build relationships and develop trust with the Aboriginal people of the region (see 'CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes' on previous page).

CentaCare's programs reflect four major themes:

- Parent-Child Services, which supports young families, including its regional implementation of the Commonwealth Government's Communities for Children program
- Youth Services, which supports at-risk young people's participation in education, training and employment
- Family Services, including counselling, drought support, financial counselling and community development programs, and
- Employment Services, which supports jobseekers and employers.

Within each of these themes there are programs which are specifically designed to reach and involve Aboriginal people, and others in which a large number of participants are Aboriginal. The organisation employs Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, providing this mix of services in response to the needs of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities of western New South Wales. Approximately one-third of CentaCare's staff across all its programs are Indigenous.

MYI:

Manage your
Income: Manage
Your Life program

The project which is the focus of this research is known as 'Manage your Income: Manage Your Life' (MYI). It is a financial literacy program for Indigenous people, designed on community development principles and run largely by Aboriginal staff of CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes. It sits within the Family Services division. The project's capacity building model aims to train and resource communities, enabling them to develop skills in financial management, leadership development, development of small business initiatives and goal setting, and to develop the confidence and skills to make positive changes in their lives. The current Team Leader is an Aboriginal woman and all but one of the staff to date have been Aboriginal.

BACKGROUND TO THE CURRENT PARTNERSHIP AND PROGRAM

Caritas Australia and CentaCare Wilcannia Forbes (CentaCare) have been working in partnership for almost a decade. Initial funding from Caritas Australia to CentaCare began in 2001-02 for the Proud to be Me Project which enabled 160 young Indigenous people to participate in arts and dance activities in the Wilcannia-Forbes region. Subsequently Caritas Australia supported Aboriginal Men's Programs and a Young Leaders Program until 2003-04. These latter programs were all run by Aboriginal men. An evaluation conducted in 2003 emphasised that their success related to the fact that they addressed the deeper causes rather than the symptoms of men's problems; used a community empowerment and community-managed model and culturally appropriate approaches (which were developed from narrative therapy); the opportunity they gave men to do things which would not have been otherwise possible; and the peer support the groups provided to them in making changes in their lives. Other factors in their success were the leadership given and developed, the flexibility and responsiveness of the programs, and the value of the paid workers who had time to organise activities (Hunt 2004: 39).

MYI has been operating since early 2004, following an earlier project called the Aboriginal Financial Counsellor Project which Caritas supported, providing initial training for an Aboriginal financial counsellor and consultations and development of workshops for Aboriginal people about personal financial management and financial skills for businesses.

After a slow start to the program during 2004 and 2005, Caritas has supported the program at a level of approximately \$130,000 per year since 2006, assisted since 2005 by financial support from the

Commonwealth Bank of Australia (which is a 'development partner' of Caritas Australia). In 2007, both Caritas and the Commonwealth Bank committed to support the program for a further three years to January 2010.

As the program has evolved and generated some success, it has, as Caritas and CentaCare hoped, also attracted funding from the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).¹⁷ This funding was for three years (May 2006–June 2009) and has now been extended for another two years. Thus the program has benefited from stable, ongoing funding from two major sources as it has developed. Caritas funding supports two Aboriginal positions and the activities which they run, while FaHCSIA funding supports a third in the same way.

HOW THE PROGRAM HAS DEVELOPED

CentaCare had been operating a financial counselling service since 1996, and through this became very aware of the low level of financial literacy among the Aboriginal community of the region.¹⁸ The financial counsellor realised that he kept seeing the same people, with the same money problems, and he realised that this was not just an issue for some isolated individuals but was a problem being experienced across the entire Aboriginal community of the region. Offering individual financial counselling was, he felt, only applying a 'bandaid', not addressing the dimensions of the problem. What was needed was an approach that helped to prevent people developing the financial problems with which he was being constantly confronted.

Some discussions with Aboriginal elders in Bourke, as well as with an experienced FaHCSIA official whom the financial counsellor knew, emphasised the fact that the way services were usually delivered—on an outreach basis—only scratched the surface of the need.¹⁹ What was required, they concluded, was an approach that would build the resources within the region to develop the services themselves. He wanted to develop a model which would be much more empowering of local people than the usual service delivery approach. Early efforts, over four years, to obtain government funding to train an Aboriginal Financial Counsellor were unsuccessful, so CentaCare turned to Caritas Australia to explore their interest in the concept.

The proposal from CentaCare to Caritas Australia was to develop an Indigenous Financial Management Program through a community development model of training local people and supporting them to share their knowledge. It was to proceed in four stages:

1. Employ and train an Aboriginal Financial Counsellor
2. Network and consult with communities in Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Broken Hill, and Wilcannia to assess interest and guide planning, and then plan the modules, strategies, and promotion
3. Offer two types of workshop: one on basic financial skills; a second on skills to set up a business
4. Train local financial mentors and other financial counsellors to provide ongoing support.

The initial focus was to be on Bourke and Walgett, as members of the Murdi Paaki ATSIC Region Men's Group and members of the Bourke community had requested this support.

By October 2004, the MYI program had begun working with four groups—two in Bourke and two in Brewarrina, training them using two basic models.²⁰ Both modules covered introductory material on money management, dealing with debt, and saving and budgeting. One module then focused on issues such as employment, taxation, Centrelink and housing issues, the other on business administration. An example of the value of this, along with follow-up financial counselling, was the case of an older Aboriginal man and his two offshoots, whose business employed 80 Aboriginal casual workers for cotton farms in the

FaHCSIA:

Department
of Families,
Community
Services and
Indigenous Affairs

region. They needed business mentoring to retain the business and secure the jobs of the 80 men for the longer term. Help with issues such as completion of taxation and especially Business Activity Statements, payroll, superannuation, and insurance were all provided, along with on-site support to establish sound administration systems.

Another success was that within two years, the men belonging to the Bourke Men's Group who worked for the Kuru Aboriginal Building Corporation as trainee or qualified builders—all of whom had debts owed to State Debt Recovery (generally for driving offences) and hence did not have current drivers' licences—had achieved their goal of paying off all their debts. Many had gained their driver licences, facilitating their employment and general social mobility. The MYI program had also provided some money management support to a group of local Aboriginal women trying to develop a business.

The Brewarrina Homemakers Group approached CentaCare for support when they gained a grant to set up a catering business (which became a canteen in the Brewarrina Central School), as well as for provision of catering services in the town. The MYI program helped them with training in the business and financial skills necessary for this enterprise, and the original trainees trained three more young women to work with them. Other women in Brewarrina began cultural consultancy work with the correctional centre there, benefitting from the business training CentaCare provided.

By 2005 the Aboriginal Financial Counsellor had been fully accredited, and was growing in confidence. He was providing financial counselling for individuals and assisting in training sessions. This person was the first fully qualified Aboriginal financial counsellor in New South Wales and only the second in Australia. However, at the end of 2005, he decided to change directions and left CentaCare. Undaunted, CentaCare invested in training another Aboriginal Financial Counsellor, who gained accreditation in 2006, and is currently the Team Leader for the MYI program, having been with CentaCare for four years.

In 2006, the program had expanded beyond Bourke and Brewarrina to include activities with two women's groups in Dubbo and Narromine; it had two part-time Aboriginal women counsellors, one of whom was funded by FaCHSIA, and was beginning work with two groups in the Lake Cargelligo area. One of the CentaCare Men's Group workers was also assisting with development of the MYI program in Peak Hill. In Narromine the women's group was developing financial skills for everyday living, including shopping on a budget, budget cooking, health and access to services, Centrelink issues, and managing bill-paying.

By the middle of that year there were six active groups with over 60 participants, and 41 tailor-made workshops had been run since mid-2005. The non-Indigenous Financial Counsellor was now qualified to train others, and able to train CentaCare's staff and some community members, usually respected elders, interested in becoming financial 'mentors' in their communities. However, the program staff were fully stretched to respond to the communities' needs within the limited resources available. While there were some core learnings for the programs, each group was unique, with different goals and issues. As one report states,

For example, one group wanted to acquire more skill in money management related to everyday living and put plans in place for when bills were due; another group was interested in delivering cultural education in the prison system but needed to know more about financial and business management and in turn educate other families and groups; and another group wanted to pay off fines in order to re-apply for driver's licences and improve their employment opportunities (CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes 2006).

What was important to the success of the program was that it responded to the different situations and goals of its participants, and met their specific financial literacy and other needs. By this stage, 75 per cent of the 61 participants said that they had 'gained an increased understanding of money management and felt confident that they could continue to improve their skills in this area' (CentaCare Wilcannia-Forbes 2006).

The MYI program has evolved and now comprises five elements, two of which relate to employment, and three of which are financial literacy activities.

1. The Good Business Program is working with individual Aboriginal entrepreneurs to help them develop business opportunities. It began as a response to the needs evident among a group of Aboriginal artists at Lake Cargelligo, who clearly needed assistance with a whole range of business skills necessary to operate commercially and market and sell their art. The Program provides a whole range of information and support—everything from tax, budgeting and cash flow issues to developing curriculum vitae for the artists, preparing promotional photographs of their art and helping them develop marketing strategies. It has assisted them in mounting two successful exhibitions, and some local artists are now selling into the Sydney art market. The support of an artist mentor temporarily employed by CentaCare was extremely valuable in helping to develop this activity.
2. The Strive2Drive Program is a 10-week program to assist Aboriginal people to qualify for their learner driver licence. It arose out of the experience of financial counselling, which indicated that the lack of a driver licence was often the reason for a person being unable to gain a job. Related to this may be the fact that the person had no birth certificate, or had state debt, and was thus unable to obtain even a learner driver licence.²¹ The program covers such issues as saving to get a car, budgeting, purchasing a car, and avoiding accidents. The MYI program also involves a great deal of one-on-one support to individual participants to resolve some of the issues which may act as barriers to them obtaining a learner driver licence.
3. The 'Spend or Save' Program is a basic financial literacy program, tailored to the interests of participating groups. For example, cooking is the entry point for a number of women's groups that take the program. The groups may be formed especially by CentaCare, or may be existing groups which express an interest in undertaking the program.
4. Financial Literacy Certificate Course. As mentioned earlier, CentaCare has developed a Certificate One course in Financial Literacy. It is currently looking for an appropriate local Registered Training Organisation with whom the course can be registered, to ensure that students who complete it gain accreditation. As this proved to be a slower process than expected, CentaCare has decided that in 2010 it will begin teaching the course module. Once a Registered Training Organisation has accepted and provided accreditation for the course, students will be able to seek recognition of prior learning and be accredited.
5. Financial Counselling. Individual counselling is provided as necessary for Aboriginal people. Often people seek help as a result of something they have learned during one of the other programs.

Thus at present, the MYI program has evolved to meet needs which have been progressively identified and responded to by CentaCare. Each program has to be carefully tailored to the particular needs, interests and contexts of the various participants. Increasingly, CentaCare is linking with other organisations whose existing groups might benefit from the training and support which CentaCare provides, such as community health services, St Vincent de Paul and similar social welfare organisations. This is contributing to greater sustainability of the program as the groups will have continuing support from their host organisations, freeing up CentaCare workers to work elsewhere after the basic training is completed. Such partnerships are not always easy, and they do rely on partners to fulfil their commitments.

USING A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

CentaCare sees their program approach as a 'community development' model, which clearly starts from their considerable knowledge of the situation of the local Aboriginal community. CentaCare's broad approach is to educate people; to give them the opportunity to help themselves and deal with social injustice in their lives. As the MYI Team Leader says, 'it's not a welfare mentality; it's about making people responsible for themselves and helping them grow as people'. It's also about giving them correct information to enable them to make decisions. The Team Leader emphasises that for her, community development involves working with individuals who in turn mentor others and make a difference in their community. She builds on the 'informal mentoring' which happens normally in the Aboriginal community, by ensuring that those informal mentors have accurate information to pass on or places to which they can refer people. In some cases the mentoring might simply involve accompanying a friend or family member to meet with CentaCare about a particular financial problem. Often the work has to take account of local histories and family relationships within the Aboriginal communities, and recognise that specific strategies are needed to reach different family groupings.

Thus MYI program aims to build the financial capacities of Aboriginal people in the various locations they serve, but it takes as its entry points the concerns of the Aboriginal people in those places. It is careful to tailor its approach to the diverse interests and the financial and related problems which commonly confront Aboriginal people in the region.²² The basic financial literacy program can be very powerful because, as one young woman who had undertaken it in Dubbo said, 'when you know how to budget it seems like you have more money'. She commented that Aboriginal people often fritter their money away and need to be taught budgeting and money management. Her achievements were considerable—she had purchased a car and was now looking for a job. Often Aboriginal people may also lack confidence in accessing financial or related services, and this may compound their difficulties, so the program tries to link people to these services, build personal links with them and help them overcome their fears.

The problems people face are not only financial—there are often problems of social isolation. One example of the community development approach is CentaCare work with the Mudyigalang (which means 'many friends') women's group in Narromine. This group began in 2005 as an MYI Group, but during the process of consulting them about their financial issues, CentaCare discovered that what the older women really wanted was somewhere to meet, where they could feel comfortable and be able to do things together. Isolation was a major problem many women faced, and for some, mental health issues were a concern. CentaCare responded to this expressed need, and over the next two years helped them find a building—the old Narromine Railway Station—which has been refurbished (with a grant CentaCare helped them gain) and is now fully set up and rented to them annually for a very low sum. The women regularly use the building two days per week, and do sewing and craft activities together, selling the diverse array of colourful products there and at markets in the region. This income covers the costs of the building's rental, their insurance and costs of materials. Interestingly, although the group is led by Aboriginal women, a few non-Aboriginal women also attend and are made welcome.

The group is proud of its entrepreneurial activities, which include providing catering services for local meetings and doing occasional office clean-ups, which both add to its ability to support local and national charities. The women make donations from their earnings, support charities in kind (e.g. through contributing their products for raffles or donations to families at Christmas). They also enjoy sharing their skills with others. They host visits from local schools, respite care and day care centres, and from a younger women's group. They teach their skills, such as sewing and crocheting, to each other as well as to visiting groups. Mudyigalang has also served other purposes—for example, health workers give monthly health checks to the women members, and other services use it as a place to consult with older women and female elders (group members must be at least 40 years old) in Narromine, thereby giving them a voice. In

a recent development, a regional Bringing Them Home Service is utilising a quiet room set up within the women's centre at the railway station as a work base during their visits to Narromine.

Members clearly value the social interaction the group provides and gain a sense of satisfaction from the activities they undertake together. One member of the group the researcher talked to summed it up, 'This is the best thing that ever happened to me'—her isolation had been overcome and she found the group very supportive.

Another example of CentaCare's responsiveness to issues relates to the 'Spend or Save' group operating from Narromine, which confronts a lack of transport for local Aboriginal women to go shopping, particularly if they want to access cheap bulk food stores for their generally large families. So as part of the practical budgeting activities, the CentaCare worker provides transport to a weekly 'Food Barn' operated by a local church which provides very low cost food for low-income people. This enables participants to take advantage of this service, and hence put their budgeting skills into practice. The women are also taught how to cook simple, low cost, and nutritious meals for their families, to try to overcome the heavy reliance on relatively expensive and high fat take-away food, which is common in the Aboriginal community. Sessions have also taught sewing (to enable them to make simple home items such as cushions and pillowslips), budgeting, banking services, funeral plans, basic computer skills (with the opportunity to access internet at the library or purchase inexpensive computers for low-income people through a Sydney recycling group). Paying bills by internet is something they want to be able to do. Women are connected to other community services such as 'No Income Loans' offered by the Dubbo Riverside Church, which provides low-income people with modest, no interest loans to purchase whitegoods and furniture, with repayment arrangements personally tailored and planned for their circumstances. Thus the program is highly practical, meets the specific needs that people express, and tries to educate them about financial matters as broadly as possible as well as connecting them to other services which can assist them.

For the women, it's also a social event once a fortnight, when otherwise they are often isolated at home with young children. They clearly value the social interaction as well as the learning which helps them with their daily lives. At times women may need one-on-one assistance with issues the session has raised for them or with problems they are confronting at that time.²³ The CentaCare worker usually knows where resources and information can be found and is able to help the individual gain the information to resolve such matters.

CentaCare is also finding that some Aboriginal people find it hard to make a regular commitment to a course (e.g. 2 hours a week for a number of weeks). They are now occasionally offering 'one off' whole day workshops which introduce people to some of the financial literacy basics. In 2009 CentaCare undertook a 'Financial Management Road Trip' to Bourke, Wilcannia, Coonamble, Walgett, and Lightning Ridge with a total of 78 participants—with largest numbers in Wilcannia and Walgett. The 'Road Trip' involved extensive preparation, not only in preparing resource kits for participants which incorporated material from a variety of services which might be able to assist Aboriginal people, but also in utilising CentaCare's networks and staff connections in each location to identify suitable venues, ways of recruiting potential participants and linking in with a variety of local services. Thus MYI is constantly evolving to meet diverse needs and respond to the challenges it faces.

One aspect of community development is linking people to services, and this is also illustrated in the way CentaCare is developing its Manage Your Business program with artists. This program began rather optimistically, hoping it could help groups of artists, but soon discovered that each artist needed a great deal of individual support to achieve their goals. CentaCare had to take into account issues including low literacy and numeracy levels and flexibility in expectations of when participants would complete specific tasks. Six artists have completed a business plan and CentaCare is now concentrating on assisting two artists who have a very strong commitment to implement their business plans, and is linking them to other

sources of expertise and support such as Parkes Business Enterprise Centre, Arts Out West, the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), the Australian Tax Office, art galleries and other government and non-government support, including some of its own men's and women's workers.

As one of these artists said, 'I didn't know there was help out there like that'. This man wanted to be able to work at home because he and his wife also have grandparenting responsibilities which they can fulfil there, but his home simply had no suitable space. In the interim he was doing his work (complex burned drawings on wood) in one corner of a kitchen/dining area, and selling valuable drawings at the local milk bar for far less than he could earn with good marketing connections. He had also exhibited work in exhibitions organised by CentaCare. His long-term goal was to earn enough money to buy a car and eventually, buy his home.

THE PARTNERSHIP

'It's a hell of a funding body that goes with you on that journey.'

(Aboriginal former staff member of MYI)

Both organisations value their long-term partnership, which has been developing since well before the MYI program began, and which depends on strong personal relationships between the Group Manager, Indigenous Programs at Caritas and staff of CentaCare and MYI specifically. This is made easier because both organisations share the same values and principles related to Catholic social teachings and a real commitment to people who are on the margins of society. They have a shared vision based on their ideas about social justice. Yet good communication, the personal contact (occasional phone calls and face-to-face visits to complement the formal reporting processes), and the openness and trust established all contribute to the transparency and honesty in the relationship which people in both organisations remarked upon and valued.

However, the success of the partnership is based on more than this, important though it is. It also reflects the ways that Caritas works. CentaCare report that as the program was starting, Caritas staff had a lot of involvement: as one CentaCare staff member said 'we walked together to find our feet'. CentaCare was certainly innovating and taking some risks, so they appreciated Caritas' willingness to support their early efforts, when they could not guarantee success. At the same time, Caritas has never constrained them; rather it has agreed broad plans and directions and then enabled CentaCare to shape and develop the program as it thinks best. They give CentaCare the space, time, confidence and resources to try new approaches, and they encourage, support, and sometimes participate in times for reflection.

CentaCare staff appreciate that Caritas staff have taken time to visit the program, and to spend two or three days most years with them, observing activities and discussing the program together. CentaCare believes that this is extremely valuable, as it enables Caritas to become aware of the context and the communities that CentaCare is working in. This in turn enables them to understand the challenges CentaCare faces as it implements the program and to discuss strategies and lessons learned in a useful way. A further aspect of the partnership is the way Caritas judges success. It is not a numbers exercise; rather, Caritas appreciates that if even one person makes a significant change in their life the effects will ripple to many other people in their family and their community. So, unlike government, they are perceived to be less interested in numbers completing trainings and more interested in the quality of the actual changes to the lives of individuals—they are really interested in the impact of the program, rather than simply the inputs and activities.

Caritas is clearly flexible, and has usually responded positively to suggested changes to the way the funding is to be used, or to requests for small additional amounts of funding to support emerging priorities. Such positive responses are not automatic though, as Caritas asks a range of questions about concepts put to them. In one case, as a result of Caritas questions, CentaCare itself realised that a program for which they

had sought funding may not be sufficiently well 'owned' by the community to be sustainable, and they chose not to proceed.

From Caritas' point of view the partnership is also valuable because it is helping Caritas itself learn as well as contribute to reconciliation. Caritas staff make the point that it is important that they are open to learning from their partners, and of course, that it is important that they follow local Aboriginal protocols in the way they work.

CBF:

Commonwealth
Bank Foundation

Finally, it is recognised that Caritas has brought a third partner to the table, the Commonwealth Bank Foundation (CBF), which has been recruited as a corporate partner of Caritas. CentaCare and Caritas appreciate this extra funding support, and CentaCare particularly appreciate that it has not required any extra reporting on their part. However, the partnership has not been altogether straightforward from Caritas' perspective, in terms of CBF seeking a direct relationship with CentaCare and at one stage making a unilateral decision which affected the overall funding arrangement. Caritas appreciates that it has traditionally worked in partnership with Church, philanthropic, government and community development organisations and has only recently begun to develop partnerships with corporate bodies. Negotiation over the new CBF funding agreement, which is being undertaken as this report is published, has also raised one specific issue which both Caritas and CentaCare are still discussing with the Foundation.²⁴

FACTORS IN THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

Although there has been no formal evaluation of the MYI program to date, there are very evident signs of success in terms of the people whose lives are changing as a result of participating in the program. Some of the evidence collated by CentaCare itself about the participation and outcomes of its programs is documented in 'CentaCare indicators of success' on the opposite page. Other indicators include: people changing their routines so that buying takeaway breakfast is far less common; people saving money for food and essentials before spending it at the local club; far fewer sightings of a pawnbroker around Dubbo recently, as Aboriginal families are now more aware of the real costs of such a service and are reluctant to utilise it; many State Debts have been cleared; people are gaining learner driver and driver licences; owning cars; getting jobs (which often involve travelling to and from the workplace, or require driving skills); purchasing whitegoods; and in a small number of cases, buying a home. The reduced social isolation of the group members, and their pride and confidence in what they are achieving are also very important as these people are modelling to others that as Aboriginal people, they can do it. The mindset change is highly significant.

People associated with the MYI program identified many reasons underlying its success, including that it meets a very basic need in the Aboriginal community for a better understanding of money and how to manage it; the way in which CentaCare works with Aboriginal people in the region; its embeddedness in the CentaCare organisation; the type of staff working in it; the timeframe over which it has been operating; resourcing and flexibility; and encouragement of staff sharing and learning.

Meeting Aboriginal people's needs

One reason the MYI program succeeds is because it meets a very basic need in the Aboriginal community for a better understanding of money and how to manage it. Many factors have led to this need; among them the fact that knowing about money is not learned in many Aboriginal families, so it is not something children learn as they grow up, as might happen in a non-Indigenous family. It is also hard to grow up facing and overcoming multiple barriers to success, such as isolation, poverty, family violence, and poor levels of education. Literacy and numeracy levels are low so that people do not always understand what commitments they are getting into (e.g. phone plans, bills), and then problems arise. The program addresses real problems which people face that are a barrier to improving their lives, and which cause

CentaCare indicators of success

Increased knowledge of services in the community and increased confidence to access other financial management resources and services reported by 100% of 472 participants

Increased understanding of money management and greater confidence in improving their skills in this area reported by 87% of 472 participants

Ability to plan and pay off debts and fines demonstrated by 87% of 401 participants

Employment or re-engaged in education following participation in the MYI program, including 3 who commenced university studies, reported by 87 participants

Support to repay outstanding debts and obtain a driver licence for 67 participants

Increased ability and confidence to mentor other community members in financial management reported by 115 participants

Since completing the program 30 participants had engaged in mentoring activities

Mentors made 11 referrals to CentaCare's Financial Counselling service during one quarter

them stress. As one Aboriginal community worker commented, everyone needs money to survive today and most Aboriginal people have very little income, so if they can learn to manage that well, it helps them. The program is also responsive to needs which arise; for example, once people have a driver licence and a car they may be ready to apply for a job, but don't know how to do that; so a special short course to help them has now been developed. The responsiveness of the program to the late 2008 economic stimulus payments is another clear example.

Good knowledge of how to work with the Aboriginal communities of the region

One striking thing about the program is the way in which CentaCare works with Aboriginal people. It clearly has, over the years, developed a level of trust with some Aboriginal people in the region which provides a sound basis for the MYI program. At the heart of this approach is a fundamental respect for the people, which they appreciate and respond to positively. But working with the diverse Aboriginal communities of the region is not easy, and it requires careful attention to the needs and interests of each group, in each location, and it means working from an understanding of their situation and the needs they identify. It also requires considerable consultation with each group about how they would like the programs delivered: careful consultation with the right people; a venue where people will feel comfortable and safe; dates and times which they find suitable; and so on. It is often the little things which make the big difference to success or failure; CentaCare takes an approach which does not simply tell people what is going to happen, or expect them to take the steps to come to the organisation. MYI goes out to the communities, tries to understand them and the issues they are grappling with, then offers to share information which those communities might find useful. It's the detailed groundwork undertaken in each community that makes the program work. Often it involves one-on-one discussions with a range of individuals or consultations with small groups. Implementing the program also involves working mostly with quite small (often family) groups of people in a very intensive way, often with a lot of one-to-one support for individual members outside the group sessions. This intense support is frequently needed if people are to be able to make changes in their lives.

Embedded in CentaCare infrastructure and networks

Linked to this knowledge of Aboriginal communities in the region is the fact that MYI is but one program within the CentaCare organisation, which is a medium sized agency with a good network of staff across the region, some of whom are able to give support to the MYI program in their locality. The relationships and knowledge the local workers have gained (particularly, though not exclusively, local Aboriginal workers) provides a strong base of support for the MYI program, particularly when it reaches out beyond the communities in which it is working intensively. The trust which CentaCare is developing with the Aboriginal communities through a variety of programs is also an asset to MYI.

The quality of the staff

One of the most significant factors in the success of the program has been the type of staff working in it. Whilst it was conceived and begun by a non-Indigenous Financial Counsellor, he was a person well-regarded by the Aboriginal community, and skilled in working with them. Most importantly he worked in ways which respected them and their knowledge.

The program has trained and engaged local Aboriginal staff from the beginning, and it is clear that having Aboriginal staff running the programs, and now leading the program entirely, is an important factor in the success. This is because they are role models who are able to convince others that a change in their lives is possible, because the staff are from the same community and they have themselves achieved what they are promoting. People see that it is possible to be Aboriginal and to manage money well. These people also know their communities well and bring that knowledge to the program. The commitment of CentaCare to train and support Aboriginal staff to run this program and to enable them to gain the necessary financial qualifications is a critical ingredient. Experience has revealed, however, that it is also important that the staff are the right Aboriginal people, ideally people well connected to the local community and well respected by as wide a cross section of that community as possible. The participants have to feel really comfortable with the staff, as there are often sensitive issues raised through the program. Recruiting and keeping the Aboriginal staff to maintain the program has been challenging for CentaCare, and these staff may find that they have to balance many demands on them as community leaders, not simply as CentaCare workers. Whilst there has been a level of stability in the staff team for a number of years, recently there has been a significant change, with the original Team Leader leaving, along with two other Aboriginal staff, in a relatively short time. While this provides the opportunity for an Aboriginal staff member to take over the team leadership role, it will inevitably take time for the new staff selected to settle in and gain the experience needed.

Timeframe

The MYI program has now been operating over five years, and although it has found some critical issues which attract Aboriginal interest and engagement in financial management, it remains open to the need to keep alert to other issues and new needs which may arise. It certainly believes that such timeframes are only the beginning of effecting change.

The program recognises that the multiple intergenerational problems confronting Indigenous people and families in western New South Wales cannot be overcome overnight. It sees no quick fixes or simple solutions. Rather, the MYI program attempts to generate changes which will be sustained—with consistent results—rather than generating short-term wins which don't last. In order to achieve that, the staff are careful to follow up individuals when they have finished their courses or programs to provide them with whatever individual support they need.

Clearly the program has demonstrated a number of strategies that work, but the staff acknowledge that because of the situation of Aboriginal people in the region, it will take a long time to achieve sustained change on a broad scale. The sustainability of the program itself currently depends on continued Caritas and FaHCSIA support.

Resources and flexibility

The program has benefitted from being resourced for the activities it runs as well as staff positions, and from Caritas' willingness to supplement the original funding on request, in order to assist changes in the program approach or priorities. The additional support from FaHCSIA has been valued as well. However, the funding levels still require staff to make difficult decisions about priorities when responding to requests for activities and programs from a variety of towns or organisations.

The flexibility of the resources provided has also enabled the program to be genuinely responsive to the needs of the people it has been working with.

Staff sharing and learning from others

Staff have certainly found that opportunities to share with Caritas' other partners through its partner meetings have been helpful in aligning Caritas and CentaCare's goals and strategies. The opportunities for CentaCare MYI staff to meet with other Aboriginal financial literacy workers and participate in the Australian Financial Counsellors and Credit Reform Association conferences has been extremely valuable. As one staff member commented, the issues different Aboriginal financial literacy workers were identifying were 'scarily' common across the country, as Aboriginal people are taken advantage of, or at least do not fully comprehend, obligations they are accepting.

CHALLENGES

Whilst the program is having successes, it also faces some challenges.

The contextual difficulties mentioned earlier are real challenges to the MYI program: CentaCare regularly confronts the fact that people are very used to hand-outs, to being told what to do, and to what staff referred to as a 'passive welfare', apparently apathetic, role. Shifting responsibility to individuals is challenging. MYI program staff know that people have to make the changes for themselves, and they give them a great deal of support to do that, but in the end they don't succeed with everyone. It can be frustrating to know that people could overcome their financial problems but don't, for various reasons—this may include the difficulty of overcoming past experiences in small communities with racist histories.

Related to this is the need to always go out to people, rather than expecting them to come to the program or the organisation. CentaCare has learned that Aboriginal people need special programs; they don't come to mainstream programs, and special effort has to be made to reach out to them, rather than wait for them to avail themselves of services offered. This includes enabling their regular participation in programs they've joined, as engaging their participation consistently is often difficult. It is particularly difficult to sustain such support to programs in the more remote parts of the Diocese.

There is also a need for further support: for example, following the Strive2Drive Program Aboriginal people need to complete 120 hours of accompanied learner driving before they are eligible for a provisional driver licence. For some this is a major hurdle for which CentaCare has found no solution, despite considerable effort—for example, by recruiting service clubs or others to help (insurance and liability is a barrier).

At times some staff feel that they need broader counselling training (they do get some basic non-financial counselling training) as the issues faced are sometimes extremely difficult and they don't always feel they

have the experience or skills to handle them (although there is expertise within the organisation to call on). Staff also find the many hours of travelling to deliver programs, and in some cases the isolation of their location, difficult.

Other challenges relate to working in partnership with other organisations, which while valuable in many ways, don't always work. A lot of time and resources can be wasted if partner organisations don't, or can't, deliver on their commitments.

CentaCare recognises that it is probably time to undertake a full evaluation of the MYI program. CentaCare is working with Social Ventures Australia on evaluation across the whole organisation, and this work will lay the basis for a full evaluation of MYI in the future. To date they have developed a clear 'program logic' for each program, including MYI. The kinds of indicators and measures the program may be able to use have been identified. MYI has started more rigorous data collection for future evaluation purposes. This is a valuable development for the staff, who feel clearer about what they are trying to achieve, and realise that their earlier goals were well beyond their capacity to influence. They are now able to clearly identify the outputs and outcomes they are seeking, and therefore will soon be able to evaluate their program achievements more rigorously.

The 'mentoring' aspect of the program is still developing slowly. CentaCare have encountered some resistance to people being identified as mentors in a formal way. Because it seems to be culturally sensitive, a more informal approach is happening. Although clearly some people are acting as mentors within their families or in organisations where they work, and the financial management ideas are being passed on, there is generally a reluctance to have this formalised.

One former staff member also raised some questions about the consistency of the financial management message (of saving money for specific goals) with Aboriginal kinship sharing and support systems. While the Aboriginal Team Leader argues that it is pointless to give money to family members who spend it freely on alcohol or in other wasteful or harmful ways, this staff member wondered, for example, whether an older woman's spending on her children, while impoverishing her now, was a long-term investment in their support for her later, and whether gambling circles were a culturally acceptable way of redistributing money (e.g. so the winner could buy a fridge or similar expensive item). She recognised that family sharing systems remained very strong in the central west of New South Wales and felt some ambiguity about the 'fit' between essentially western financial management messages with such systems.

REFLECTIONS: THE PROGRAM AND THE PARTNERSHIP

The research set out to explore how INGOs working with Indigenous communities and community organisations reflected the community development approaches which both the Indigenous sector and the INGO sector favour, and to understand more about the 'partnerships' between them. This case study has revealed some valuable insights into these questions.

Clearly, the political and social welfare context of Australia has a marked impact on the response to programs here compared to those of Caritas partners in developing countries. A level of dependency has been created by a range of policies and experiences which is hard to shake. Aboriginal people in central west New South Wales may view their marginalised situation as impossible to change, and require intensive support to overcome the multiple layers of disadvantage they experience, so as to gain control of their finances and their life directions.

However, Caritas employs the same principles in the way it works with Australian partners and communities as it does internationally. Most critically, CentaCare emphasises respect and support for the Aboriginal people it works with; it sees them as the agents of change in their own lives, and does what it can, through provision of information, personal support and access to networks of assistance, to empower people to

make the changes they aspire to. This reflects well the emphasis on the human dignity of each person which is at the heart of Caritas and CentaCare's approach to development.

The commitment by both Caritas and CentaCare to train and support local Aboriginal workers to gain the qualifications necessary to undertake this financial management work also reflects a commitment to building local capacity, and has been a critically important factor in the success of the MYI program. The idea of trying to develop community or family-based mentors represents a further effort to build wider community capacity in the financial management area.

The partnership works well because of the shared visions, the strong personal and face-to-face contacts, and the flexibility which Caritas offers, enabling its partners to take risks and innovate. Caritas has enabled CentaCare to try things out with a group of people who are rarely effectively served by mainstream organisations, and who are acknowledged as difficult to reach by such bodies. The way in which Caritas facilitates local decision-making and responsiveness of the program to locally-emerging issues and needs is important, and consistent with the international approach Caritas adopts.

The program's challenge is a long-term one; it does a lot with relatively small amounts of funding, but the size of the task is great, and it is hard to see how such a program will be able to attract and sustain sufficient funding over the long term, given the relatively limited capacity of INGOs, and the tendency for government funding programs and cycles to be short-term and changeable.

To summarise, the factors in the success of the partnership and this program appear to be:

- the shared vision and principles which the partners embrace, particularly respect for Aboriginal clients
- the strong personal relationships between the relevant staff of the two partner organisations
- the training of Aboriginal staff to achieve the necessary financial qualifications, and their capacity to run the program
- the willingness to share risk and foster innovation and flexibility
- the high degree of local responsiveness to Aboriginal needs and local decision-making about the way programs are run, including the very 'hands on' approaches
- the extent of detailed knowledge about the local Aboriginal communities and families and how to work successfully with them which is developing within CentaCare
- the trust and the networks which CentaCare has established across the region with Aboriginal people, and its commitment and ability to reach out to them
- the longevity of the program support, which has enabled the program to develop valuable tools and training approaches that work, and to build Aboriginal staff capacity to manage the whole program.
- the linkages the program has developed with other services which can assist Aboriginal people in a variety of ways, and with services whose clients can also benefit from the MYI program.

The challenges are:

- the welfare context, which has often led to a mindset of dependency and lack of confidence to overcome multiple layers of disadvantage
- the level of support some individuals need to participate in and complete some programs
- the difficult and sensitive issues which people confront in their work
- the distances to travel and the remoteness of some parts of the region
- forging successful partnerships with other organisations
- developing a data base and strategies for evaluating the program more rigorously
- ensuring program strategies are consistent with cultural mores and expectations.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to better understand the way INGOs work with Indigenous Australian communities—to explore how international development principles are being translated into development work in these contexts.

The two INGOs being studied, Oxfam Australia and Caritas Australia, are significant players in international development. Each is affiliated with a large global NGO network which has its own development ethos and experience. Thus while Oxfam operates from a rights-based perspective, Caritas operates from Catholic social justice teachings and the concept of 'integral human development'. Yet in practice they work with Indigenous Australian partners in somewhat similar ways. That is, they financially support projects conceived primarily by Indigenous people to meet Indigenous needs, and they provide support for (and/or arrange for the provision of) training and organisational capacity to build support as required. Yet the partnerships are obviously different. One is directly with an entirely Indigenous-controlled urban-based organisation, the other with an Indigenous program of a mainstream non-profit organisation which makes significant efforts to engage with Indigenous people in its wide rural service area.

Each case study has demonstrated that the context of Indigenous Australia is vastly different from the contexts in developing countries where these organisations primarily work. The role of governments, the nature of the welfare system, and the entire colonial experience and its continuing effects shape the environment in which they work and significantly affect the communities with whom they are working. Recognising and adjusting to these differences is essential.

A feature of both partnerships is that they each articulate a sense of the shared vision, principles or values which underpin their partnership. These principles recognise and support Indigenous self-determination and leadership, and Indigenous ways of doing things. These programs are not micro-managed; rather some broad goals and program strategies are agreed and then the Indigenous partners are encouraged to develop the project. The partnerships have thrived when strong personal relationships exist between key players within the two partner organisations and when regular face-to-face visits or phone calls are used to stay in touch. When staffing changes became rather frequent in one INGO, the levels of trust and shared understandings with their Indigenous partner fell. These personal relationships require a high level of skill in cross-cultural communication, and this has to be learned by both partners, but particularly the INGO staff who interact in a variety of ways with the Indigenous partners (including in relation to fundraising, media and promotions), as well as program management staff.

Both organisations are acutely conscious of the power relations which exist as a result of the funding relationship, and try hard to reduce the power imbalance that seems inevitable. Thus, despite one INGO's best efforts, in the end, its reduction of funding to the Indigenous partner was keenly felt, and the high level of trust achieved earlier in the partnership was somewhat dented.

Evaluation strategies obviously differ, and in this area perhaps more attention is warranted. In one case, the participative methodology gave the Indigenous partner a strong stake in the evaluative process; they contributed to the terms of reference for the evaluation and their staff participated as members of the evaluation team. This was time-consuming for them, but it also enabled them to experience where the recommendations came from and to help shape them. Had this process been undertaken earlier in the partnership it could have been considerably more valuable to everyone involved. In the other case, evaluation was part of a wider process of establishing very precisely what the organisation was trying to achieve and better documenting data to indicate the level of success. In some ways, this seemed to be a more orthodox approach to evaluation through assessing outcomes. Of course, in the process staff were also developing skills in clarifying goals and collecting data relevant to them to use in an evaluative way. It seems that there is scope for INGOs and their Indigenous partners to explore evaluation approaches, and ways of assessing impact, as in both cases there were challenges associated with how to really assess outcomes and impact and report on them.

Both case studies illustrate the value of the length and evolution of the partnerships but each raises the issue of eventual sustainability and 'exit strategy' for the INGO. Programs such as these may require continuing funding over a very long time if they are to resolve the very complex, multi-dimensional and deep-seated problems which they are tackling in many Aboriginal families and communities. The time and level of support which particular families and individuals need to transform their lives is significant. Whilst both case studies illustrate how initial INGO funding has led to government support for the partners, what both partners value is the flexibility and responsiveness of the INGOs and their willingness to support changes in the way the funds can be used to meet new circumstances or grasp opportunities. This is a quality they do not generally experience with funding from government programs.

In both case studies, there is a high level of respect for Aboriginal decision-making, and an appreciation and support for local solutions to problems, combined with the recognition that sometimes support or mentoring is required. This may simply be in the form of a few questions which help project workers think an idea through; at other times, it may be personal/professional mentoring to achieve particular goals or help resolve tricky organisational issues.

In terms of the community development ideas which INGOs often espouse, it is clear that commonly used participatory community development processes and strategies used overseas are not generally considered appropriate by Aboriginal community development workers. However, the *principles* of empowerment are relevant, albeit in a more difficult setting, where disempowerment and dependency has been created by past policies and experiences, and where overcoming this is challenging. The strong family and kin networks within Aboriginal communities are central to how Aboriginal community development takes place. It is through these networks that Aboriginal community workers operate. They have to take into account the local politics and historical experiences within communities, even as they work to help people move beyond them. Word of mouth and face-to-face interaction remains the strongest communication strategy in the Aboriginal community, and workers constantly focus on establishing highly supportive, non-judgemental relationships with the people with whom they are working. They use family networks to communicate and to link into the networks to which those families are connected. It is often about enabling people to believe in themselves, and supporting them to make changes in their lives which aren't easy to make. They also, importantly, link these individuals and families to outside help as required. In social capital terms, Aboriginal families have strong 'bonding' capital; what they often lack is the 'bridging'

or 'linking' capital to the resources and support available in the wider community. Equally, those offering such services often are unaware of Aboriginal needs, or do not know how to go about providing their services in ways which encourage Aboriginal people to access them. Aboriginal community development workers can be important link-points across these gaps.

Aboriginal organisations and workers may value and benefit from sharing more about and discussing grass-roots approaches to community development that work in Australian Indigenous communities. There is a real paucity of relevant resources and few real opportunities for Aboriginal community workers to share their experiences and learn from each other. Both INGOs try to address this with annual partner workshops, but these may not fulfil all the needs of Aboriginal community development workers. Their work is often extremely demanding and they need debriefing opportunities, time to reflect, and a level of personal support to deal with the challenges they confront daily.

While INGOs are small players compared to governments in the context of Indigenous Australia, the two case studies here show that relatively small amounts of money used strategically can help support innovative, Aboriginal-developed initiatives to support needs Aboriginal people themselves identify, with a significant degree of success. This research shows how a mainstream social welfare organisation in Australia can engage with Aboriginal people in its region and seriously address the challenges they face through contextually-relevant programs, led by Aboriginal staff. Whilst more could be done to develop and apply simple evaluation approaches to provide a better evidence base for these successful programs and activities, the changes they are bringing about in the lives of Aboriginal people and families is clearly evident.

NOTES

1. The total NGO funding to Indigenous Australian programs in 2008–09 amounted to approximately \$19 million, with the major known players the following INGOs: The Fred Hollows Foundation, Oxfam Australia, World Vision Australia, Save the Children Australia, Caritas Australia, Australian Red Cross, Marie Stopes Australia, Australian Volunteers International, Engineers Without Borders, and International Women's Development Agency. This figure does not incorporate the costs of the INGO staff and office support to the Indigenous programs, nor other NGO programs in which Indigenous people participate along with other Australians. It is thus a conservative figure.
2. The others being Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific.
3. This work continued when ATSIC was split and the operational responsibility was taken up by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services, with whom Oxfam Australia then worked.
4. Further details of the growth are found in Oxfam Australia and Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation 2009.
5. Up till then funding from Community Aid Abroad/Oxfam had been only small amounts for discrete activities or projects.
6. At this stage, there were some competing demands on the CEO and CDO's time, so they were not able to participate as fully in this part of the process as would have been desirable—although both were involved for around one-and-a-half days. The Yorgum Research Officer, however, was able to participate throughout and brought a valuable perspective to the analysis because of her knowledge of the context and of Yorgum as an organisation. It is important to note that the CEO and the CDO had both spent almost two weeks preparing for and participating in the evaluation, and that the CEO had committed to an important meeting before the dates of the evaluation were finalised. The time required is considerable for a participatory process such as this, and is very demanding of staff.
7. SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to achieve that objective.
8. Although at the time of this research Yorgum was promoting the Redress Scheme. However, Yorgum is now petitioning against Redress on the basis that it is retraumatising the victims: the Scheme has lowered the minimum amount to be paid, reduced the largest payment from \$80,000 to \$45,000, and the Western Australia Government has not adhered to their initial discussions and statements.
9. There may also have been a perception on the part of the Yorgum staff that the Oxfam team members were not really familiar with the community development program. The Oxfam team members had worked largely from Project documents and reports to understand the nature of the community development program, and had only really discussed its scope and nature as part of shaping the Terms of Reference and preparing for the evaluation. This may have given Yorgum the impression that the Oxfam team members didn't really know enough about the program we were jointly evaluating.
10. Oxfam staff involved in the evaluation understood that the matter of an evaluation was raised with Yorgum in 2006, though Yorgum's CEO has no recollection of that having happened. Oxfam staff believe that issues within both Oxfam and Yorgum led to the delay in carrying out the evaluation.
11. Even Aboriginal people themselves may not recognise that they possess the capacities needed, but after an inspirational international visit to health organisations in New Zealand, Canada and Alaska, a leader of one of Oxfam's Aboriginal partners returned with the insight 'we are the ones we're waiting for'—determined to move beyond all the constraints and work positively towards what Aboriginal people want.

12. Similarly, Caritas is changing how it does its monitoring visits. In Cambodia, for example, rather than staff staying overnight in a District town, they are now 'rolling out the mat' to sleep in the village and have evening conversations. This is leading to a different level of trust being established with partners and the participants in programs.
13. For example, one staff member visiting Caritas Sri Lanka for a monitoring and accompaniment visit found that the country and the partner were in turmoil as the ongoing conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the government had suddenly worsened dramatically. She abandoned any attempt to carry out the monitoring schedule she had planned and just offered to help. This reportedly turned into the best partner visit that staff member had ever had with the Sri Lankan organisation. Another quite different example related to a difficult decision that Caritas had to convey to a partner in Nepal that their funding would have to reduce because of a budget shortfall in Caritas Australia. By approaching this in a partnership spirit, to explore together how the partner could use less resources more strategically to benefit the program, local staff developed a more strategic approach and the partnership reportedly became stronger through mutual learning, despite the difficult financial situation.
14. It was also observed that with church-affiliated organisations there may be a decision of a bishop to move a person to a different role in a diocese.
15. While this is a complex issue, in comparison to Indigenous Australia, communities overseas who have no such entitlements may seem more enthusiastic about using the Caritas funds to benefit their community. For example, some Indigenous Australian community organisations with whom Caritas partners in Northern Australia use CDEP to employ trainees for programs. This CDEP program provides no incentive in relation to the quality of their work as they can simply rely on CDEP payments as welfare entitlements; on the other hand, there is no guarantee that if they were paid in some other way that any poor work attitudes would be improved.
16. However, it had been clear that there had been some differences of view between the group and the Caritas leadership, in part over development approaches, and in part about funding priorities. In particular, Caritas staff found that as Caritas professionalised and changed, they were increasingly being required to take a greater role in project design and appraisal in their support of partner organisations. On the other hand, a member of the former Indigenous Reference Group felt that Caritas failed to understand that funding of some Indigenous church-related activities was not seen by the reference group as proselytising (which Caritas was bound not to do due to its membership of the Australian INGO Code of Conduct), but rather as embracing holistic faith development. Whilst there had been frank and robust discussions on these topics between the Indigenous Reference Group and the Caritas leadership, it seems they could not fully resolve their differences; the Group members felt quite hurt by Caritas' eventual decision to disband the group.
17. This funding was gained by CentaCare directly from FaHCSIA, not through Caritas.
18. According to the Australian Institute of Family Studies (n.d.), 'Of the 1,700 Aboriginal people who had accessed CentaCare's Financial Counselling Service between 1996 and 2004, 97% were assessed as failing a basic financial literacy test'.
19. The problem of such outreach models of service delivery are also discussed in McCausland & Vivian (2009) with respect to Wilcannia and Menindee.
20. These were Brewarinna Working Men's Group, OEC Training Group (Bourke), OEC Training Group (Brewarrina), and Bourke Goolbri Men's Group. Orana Education & Training Co-operative Ltd (OEC) is a community focused not-for-profit co-operative operating throughout central and western New South Wales.
21. In the first program run by CentaCare, 12 participants had State Debts amounting to \$45,000 between them.

22. This is an important point which complements suggestions made for good practice in developing financial literacy initiatives with Indigenous Australians, many of which are reflected in this program (see Financial Literacy Foundation 2007).
23. When the researcher visited one group, for example, one woman whose son required surgery in a Sydney hospital urgently needed money for a week's accommodation for herself at the hospital while he was there—although cheap for Sydney, it was still an extra expense which she could not meet.
24. As these negotiations are currently underway, no further details can be made available at this point.

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