OPPORTUNITIES, IMPEDIMENTS AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT BY AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

The living standards of Aboriginal people from remote communities in Australia, and to a lesser degree of Aboriginal people living in rural and urban regions, are similar to those seen in poverty stricken third world countries. Education levels are substandard; welfare dependency is the normal mode of existence; and unemployment and underemployment rates are higher than any other group within Australian society (Foley 2003). Life expectancy is significantly lower than that of non-Aboriginal people. Health and welfare policies and programs of the Australian Government aimed at addressing these problems have arguably failed while the current focus has shifted to improving well-being by encouraging support for employment and business enterprise initiatives.

Wealth creation through enterprise development is an attractive alternative to income dependency upon welfare programs. Enterprise development can be conducted on a range of scales, from large to small businesses, the latter category being most characteristic of Australian Aboriginal enterprises. Small businesses in Australia are presently categorised into three groups: (1) Non-employing businesses (sole proprietorships and the self-employed); (2) Micro-businesses (employing one to four people, including non-employing businesses); and (3) Other small businesses (businesses employing five or more people, but less than 20 people) (DIMIA, 2003, p. 21). A recent analysis of 2001 census data (Hunter, 2004a) revealed that less than five per cent of Australia's Aboriginal workforce was an employer or was simply self-employed, a significantly lower rate than was found among non-Aboriginal people.

IMPEDIMENTS TO SUCCESS IN ABORIGINAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Aboriginal businesses in remote and rural communities differ from those in mainstream Australian society in several important ways. They are more likely to have their origins and connections in non-commercial or subsidised community-based activities, have some history of non-Indigenous management or financial control, be community-owned rather than owner-operated and be more focussed on community usefulness and employment rather than profit on capital (Flamsteed & Golding, 2005). In addition, there is a relative lack of suitable models for profitable and sustainable Indigenous business development in remote communities that could be utilized to help facilitate Indigenous community development.

There have been a number of published reports and comments on the impediments or barriers to sustainability and success in Aboriginal enterprise development. Descriptions of these impediments or barriers are highlighted in Table 1 and summarised in Table 2. The lack of culturally appropriate business models and related cultural issues such as native title disputes appear to be the most problematic issue facing Aboriginal communities or groups wishing to establish business enterprises. Solutions also need to be found to the problems of lack of business skills, access to advice and, in the case of remote and regional enterprises, remoteness from markets and other location specific problems.

CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE OUTCOMES

A driving factor for enterprise development by Aboriginal entrepreneurs or groups is the desire to create a better future for young Aboriginal people while at the same time maintaining the strength and vitality of traditional cultural practices. Family relationships are of fundamental importance and often take priority over business activities. Grieving and attendance at funerals, for example, is a deeply embedded cultural obligation and one that may conflict with day-to-day business activities. Similarly, family obligations can create tensions in business partnerships and can lead to business failure.

The importance of taking cultural issues into account in business development in rural and remote Aboriginal communities have been highlighted in a recent research report by Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA), a project that is examining Aboriginal business training requirements:

> Indigenous people in rural and remote areas are generally living in a very complex social, cultural and family environment which has a different view of the world and which engenders differing values and aspirations. Ceremonial, cultural, community and family obligations may have pre-eminent priority in the lives of many Indigenous people. They can often experience difficulty in understanding and dealing with the requirements of working within a small business context that is based on non-Indigenous values and structures. (IBSA, 2005, 9)

In a similar vein, Dodson and Smith comment that

> 'Culture' itself is discussed in many reports as being an influential factor in development at a local level. It is argued, on the one hand, that Aboriginal cultural values, traditional collective structures and consensus decision making hold back economic development. They are said to be at odds with western ideas of capitalism and the market place, and to undermine individual and family enterprise initiatives that require savings and profit-making. Some Indigenous groups are characterised as being opposed to economic development because it undermines their culturally based behaviours and values. Other reports argue that 'culture' should be central to any development initiative, but are unclear as to how this is to be achieved. (Dodson & Smith, 2003, p. 8)

The importance of taking cultural issues into consideration in economic development is supported by research conducted by the Harvard Project on American Indian Development, which reports that

> Culture matters. Not long ago, the federal government espoused the argument that acculturation was a means to development. Indians, they argued, would develop as soon as they shed their "Indian-ness." Research by the Harvard Project finds

TABLE 1   Impediments and barriers to success in Indigenous enterprises

Source	Impediment or Barrier
Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, *Achieving economic independence*, Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Kingston, ACT, 3	• Lack of personal financial management skills • Lack of confidence to enter small business • Finding business partners • Establishing networks with the business sector • Access to good advice • Identifying opportunities • Remoteness to markets • Lack of capital • Negative perceptions about credit worthiness • Restrictions upon the transfer of native title and statutory land grants
Ahmat, R. (2003). *Doing Indigenous social business and enterprise: the view from Cape York*. Address to the Indigenous Enterprise Summit, Canberra, 21 May 2003. http://www.partnerships.org.au	• Ownership issues — Unresolved tension between communal assets and opportunities; problems with communal ownership of assets, resources and opportunities and communal relationships and obligations • Lack of planning on incentive and reward structures for community owned enterprises • Governance structures — Indigenous social and cultural imperatives often impede efficient management • Lack of expertise, experience, support institutions and networks
Central Land Council informant 2005. Cited by Flamsteed & Golding (2005).	• Lack of capital • Lack of management knowledge • Reluctance of lending institutions • Remoteness from markets • Lack of infrastructure • Cultural factors • Failure of NT Education system to provide basic satisfactory education outcomes for Aboriginal people at primary, secondary and tertiary levels
Flamsteed, K. & Golding, B. (2005). *Learning through Indigenous Business: The role of vocational education and training in Indigenous enterprise and community development*. NCVER, Adelaide.	• Lack of access to business services and commercial labour markets • 'Metro-centrism' of service delivery • Lack of commercial business models and sites • Lack of incentives for learning about and through Indigenous business • Unrealistic expectations of wide benefits for communities involved in businesses • Limited rewards for community members with responsibilities in community businesses • Problems associated with Indigenous family relationships
IBSA (2005). *Indigenous small business skills development project stage 2 research report*. Innovation and Business Skills Australia.	• Cultural issues such as such as differing worldview, values and aspirations, difficulties in working within a small business context that is based on non-Indigenous values and structures, conflicts between working in a small business and attending to community and cultural obligations and family peer pressure not to charge for goods and services • Lack of knowledge and appreciation of government regulatory requirements

Table 1 (continued)

Source	Impediment or Barrier
IBSA (2005). continued	• Lack of governance skills • Low literacy and numeracy skills • Higher costs and lack of access to services and qualified staff in remote areas
Maddern, P. (2005). *Remote communities: Where are the jobs?* Presentation to the Bennelong Society Conference, September 2005.	• Remoteness — Isolation, transport costs, tiny local populations, communication difficulties, lack of local infrastructure • Regulation — regulated wages • Welfare safety net — leads to lack of incentive • Difficulties in developing real economies in remote communities • Gap between cost of employment and financial return from private enterprise in remote communities • Poor foundational education
Philpot, S. (2005). *Governance training for Indigenous entrepreneurs and retail employers*, Power Point Presentation to Project Advisory Committee of the Indigenous Small Business Development Project, IBSA, Melbourne. Cited by IBSA (2005).	• Corporate governance issues such as — Ineffective representation — Untrained board members — Inappropriate constitutions — Failure to use the constitution — Lack of financial knowledge — Lack of knowledge about tax — Little Board contact with funding bodies — Lack of insurance — Inappropriate use of corporate assets — Failure to maintain correct meeting procedures

Table 2 Summary of comments on barriers and impediments

Impediment or Barrier	Frequency of comment
Lack of culturally appropriate business models and related cultural issues	6
Lack of business skills and access to advice	5
Remote location issues e.g., access to markets and business services	5
Lack of infrastructure and support institutions	
Government regulations, structures and 'metro-centrism' approach	4
Lack of incentives	3
Poor foundational education	3
Lack of business networks	2
Lack of business capital	2

exactly the opposite: Indian culture is a resource that strengthens tribal government and has concrete impacts upon such bottom line results as forest productivity and housing quality. Not only does culture provide important institutional resources, but a match between institutions of government and culture also matters to success.

Many Aboriginal businesses have management structures that include non-Indigenous

managers, a strategy that can allow Aboriginal people to overcome some of the cultural impediments to business success. The above cited IBSA report emphasised the benefits of non-Indigenous management, industry and board expertise in Indigenous small businesses (IBSA, 2005, p. 7). The authors concluded that this non-Indigenous expertise can be critical to the success and ongoing viability of an Indigenous business. In contrast, Flamsteed and Golding (2005) report that situations in which Indigenous quasi-businesses were primarily conducted using non-Indigenous managers could exacerbate welfare dependency. Of critical importance is the management style and practices of the non-Indigenous manager: adopting a mentor approach aimed at gradual development of business skills of Aboriginal participants, combined with the simultaneous devolution of management responsibility is likely to benefit the business and the Aboriginal entrepreneurs. On the other hand adopting a dictatorial management style that does little to promote skills development or decision sharing is likely to perpetuate welfare dependency.

LACK OF BUSINESS SKILLS

Lack of business skills and experience is an acknowledged problem in enterprise development by Aboriginal entrepreneurs and community groups (Table 2) and is currently being addressed by a range of government initiatives. Of particular note is the current project being conducted by IBSA aimed at developing appropriate standards for training Indigenous people to be small business entrepreneurs or to work in rural or remote community stores. The one-year project commenced in July 2005 and specifically addresses the training needs of employees, managers and directors of small business enterprises. In consultations aimed at identifying priority training areas, skills in communication, literacy and numeracy, computer operations, understanding community and culture, dealing with 'humbug' or family pressures, corporate governance, hygiene and presentation, occupational health and safety, time management, logistics and merchandise control and a range of skills relating to financial and business management, business planning and marketing, were among the 105

listed skills, knowledge and attitudes discussed during the consultations (IBSA, 2005, pp. 9–21).

Aboriginal small business training activities are currently being conducted by First Australians Business (FAB), an organisation funded by the Australian government that provides a national mentoring program for Indigenous business people interested in developing a small business. At the request of an Aboriginal community FAB will visit the community and conduct generic business development workshops or technical workshops in specific areas as well as provide advice and assistance on aspects of small business development and operation. The initial workshop, 'Discovering Enterprise', comprises sessions on cultural barriers to business, identifying opportunities, marketing, the preparation of business plans, financial management and other topics. Specific business ideas are discussed and workshopped with FAB staff and further training workshops are provided upon request.

LACK OF ACCESS TO ADVICE

The lack of access to both advice and business capital are other reported barriers to success in Aboriginal enterprise development that have been or are currently being addressed through government funded initiatives. One of the most important of these initiatives has been the establishment of Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), a Commonwealth statutory authority established in April 2001 through the passing of amendments to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act* (1989). The Act, titled the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Act* (2000), received Royal Assent and commenced in 2001 (IBA, 2005). In March 2005 the Act was amended to transfer two key additional economic programs from the then existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to IBA, the Indigenous Business Development Program and the Home Ownership Program. The transfer of these programs to IBA has enabled the organisation to contribute more holistically to the economic development of Aboriginal Australians through a suite of complementary programs and has placed IBA as a key player in the 'whole of government' approach to Indigenous economic development.

Through the Australian Government's Equity and Investments Program (EIP), IBA invests directly in business opportunities, usually through joint venture arrangements with specialist industry partners. The total Australian Government investment in EIP to date has been $70.4 million and the IBA currently has an asset base of over $100 million (IBA, 2005). IBA presently is directly involved in some 28 investments throughout Australia and 20 in rural and remote areas in an extensive range of industries including commercial property, mining and mine services, transport, manufacturing, retail and services, agriculture and fisheries, tourism and financial services. The Australian Government Indigenous Land Corporation is another government organisation that is making a significant contribution to economic development through the provision of funding for land purchase and land management activities. FAB is also providing business advice to Aboriginal community groups as are other federal and state government agencies. Investment in Aboriginal enterprises by the private sector is growing, while mining company support for enterprise initiatives is also occurring, particularly in the North West of Western Australia.

REMOTE LOCATION ISSUES

The emphasis on remote location as a critical impediment to success in Aboriginal enterprise development would appear to be overstated. Seventy-three per cent of Aboriginal Australians live in major cites or regional centres (Altman, 2000), where business enterprise is being actively pursued (Ord & Mazzarol, 2005; Foley, 2006). Access to markets and business services should not be a problem to these communities or groups. While enterprise development in remote Aboriginal communities is presenting a significant challenge for both the communities and government agencies alike, the remote location is not an insurmountable barrier. A focus on place-based cultural tourism, arts and crafts, participation in management of national parks, enterprise activities servicing local mining companies or government service agencies combined with an innovative use of Internet marketing as is occurring in the Aboriginal art industry, are all business areas or strategies that can assist to overcome the tyranny of distance.

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Success factors for Aboriginal enterprise development in Australia have not been widely analysed or reported. Rather the emphasis to date has been on examining the impediments to sustainable enterprise development rather than factors contributing to its success. Indigenous Business Australia, in their report to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (IBA, 2005, p. 3), concluded that a careful assessment of the opportunities and business proposals and the provision of training, aftercare support and mentoring appear to be critical success factors. A 2001 survey conducted by the Allen Consulting Group for the Australian Business Council of Indigenous communities participating in collaborative activities with non-Indigenous businesses found that mentoring of trainees and workers, and the promotion of positive role models for youth were critical success factors for collaboration and employment activities. Capacity development for business enterprise is undoubtedly of central importance to successful outcomes (Schacter, 2000) and can be informed by the knowledge and experience that has been gained by agencies providing economic assistance to underdeveloped countries (Jaycox, 1993; UNDP, 1998; Bolger, 2000; DFID, 2002; Fukuda-Parr, Lopes & Malik, 2002; Oxfam, 2002; Lavergne, 2004), programs or organisations dealing with disadvantaged community groups within developed nations such as the United States (Harvard Project on American Indian Development; Murray & Dunn, 1995) and Scotland (Atterton, 2001; Barker, 2005) as well as by authoritative reviews on best practice approaches and emerging policy directions (UNDP, 1998; Lavergne & Saxby, 2001; Wescott, 2002; Horton, Alexaki, Bennet-Lartey et al., 2003; Hunt, 2005).

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIGENOUS BUSINESS ENTERPRISE

In recent years there has been a paradigmatic shift in the approach taken by organisations involved in the provision of aid and assistance to developing countries from one of transference of resources and technology to one of transforma-

tion from within. At the same time, the social science underpinning this shift in thinking and approach is being explored and evaluated (Atterton, 2001; Lopes & Theisohn, 2003). The shift in process and operational approach has resulted from a recognition that unless the country/community receiving the aid is intimately involved in the planning and implementation process, the outcome is generally one of failure (Nair, 2003). The focus of development thinking and practice is changing from one of 'process, technology and policy' to include that of 'people' and their capacity to achieve change in their communities, and of finding the right balance between the two modalities. Capacity development is considered to be an essential component of the overall package, the term 'capacity' referring to "the ability of individuals, institutions, and societies to perform functions, solve problems, as well as set and achieve a country's development goals in an effective, participatory and sustainable manner" (Nair, 2003, p. 1). Capacity development efforts are being increasingly focussed on enhancing social capital and on the involvement of civil society in development activities (Atterton, 2001). Principles for development co-operation using a people centred focus include local participation, ownership and control, emphasis on the use of local capacities, a sound understanding of local conditions, a coaching, supportive role for technical assistance, an iterative and flexible approach, and a systemic, long-term perspective (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001, p. 7).

The value of having a localised focus in economic development activities, and of aiming policies to strengthen local, immobile resources — human capital, including local knowledge, environmental capital, social capital and cultural capital — has been stressed (Atterton, 2001, p. 9), although the influence of the wider, enabling (or disabling) environment on development outcomes is also seen to be of fundamental importance (Wescott, 2002; Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; Hunt, 2005). Policy makers are being urged to direct their efforts to creating the best environment or milieu for small firms through encouraging entrepreneurship, boosting local pride and social cohesion and facilitating access to labour, information and other forms of assistance (Atterton, 2001). The importance of up-front socio-political analysis based on the perspectives of the local

community, that identifies the needs of interest groups and likely effects of proposed development initiatives is also being emphasised (Andrews, 2004).

The importance of using a holistic 'systems' approach — taking into account a range of scales the interactions and interrelationships of the various elements and influences that might affect the outcome of a development initiative — has been stressed by a number of authors (UNDP, 1998; Lavergne & Saxby, 2001; Lavergne, 2004; Hunt, 2005) as has the desirability of forming 'development partnerships' in which both donors and recipients collaborate to identify development needs and goals and create pathways and competent institutions to achieve these goals (Wescott, 2002; Barker, 2005). Networking is widely recognised as a useful capacity development strategy for small firms (Johannisson, 1987; Atterton, 2001) and has been recommended as a strategy for supporting small business development by Australian Aboriginal people (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000; Ahmat, 2003; IBA, 2005). The elements of collaborative networks and partnership methods include: pilot programs, training and research, evaluation, information sharing, identification of gaps, supporting local, national and regional strategies and the development of common goals, principles and tools (Wescott, 2002).

Capacity development approaches used by Australian government agencies to assist and promote Aboriginal economic development are currently mostly of a 'transference' rather than a 'transformation' mode. Application of current thinking and practice of capacity development in the international arena to Australian Aboriginal economic development will require a shift in government agency attitudes and approaches as well as an adaptation to local requirements. For example, the concept of 'social capital' in an Aboriginal community context needs to be clearly defined and understood (Hunter, 2004b), and strategies to enhance social capital more fully evaluated. Possible effects of location (remote Aboriginal community versus urban or regional communities) on the nature and approaches used to strengthen social capital and conduct businesses should be explored. While addressing skills shortage of Australian Aboriginal business entrepreneurs is another urgent requirement, the approach that is taken to training and skills

development should be culturally appropriate (Batty et al., 2004, p. 16) and preferably occur within, rather than external to, an existing enterprise activity. A lack of suitable incentives for skills development has been noted as has the absence of suitable commercial business models that incorporate a multi-faceted approach of both community and business enterprise development (Flamsteed & Golding, 2005). The value and importance of mentoring and empowerment through ownership and enhancing self confidence should be evaluated. Cross-cultural influences on best practice processes, incentives and goals of economic development initiatives, in particular the effect of differing worldviews of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants should be taken into consideration. A recent review of capacity development in the international development context and the implications for Indigenous Australians is provided by Hunt (2005) who describes a number of alternative approaches for capacity development that are based on strengths and capacities that already exist within the Aboriginal community or organisation. Demonstration projects should be conducted to trial these different approaches, with the aim of identifying best practice methodology.

AN AUSTRALIAN CASE STUDY

Current principles and practices for economic development being espoused by leading development agencies have been applied in an Australian context in a project involving a remote community in Central Australia, the Titjikala Community (see Figure 1). The project is being conducted by the Plants for People program (P4P), a capacity development and research program comprising sustainable development projects conducted by Aboriginal communities in partnership with P4P research and teaching staff that involves the documentation, evaluation and application of traditional knowledge of indigenous plants and their uses. The overall goal of P4P is to combine traditional and western scientific knowledge to enhance the well-being and affluence of Aboriginal people through identifying effective strategies for developing sustainable enterprises based on local plant resources. Two projects have been conducted to date with the Titjikala Community. The first one designed to build on successes of earlier community strate-

gies to reduce domestic violence and enhance self-esteem through activities based around cultural knowledge, cultural exchanges and cultural employment, the second one aimed at using a case study approach to develop best practice models for the documentation, reclamation and generational transfer of Indigenous knowledge of plants of local cultural significance and for the application of this knowledge in Indigenous social and business enterprise development. Project activities include planning meetings and workshops, field trips to collect plant specimens and record traditional knowledge about the plants and their uses, the recording of this information on an electronic data base, laboratory studies on selected plant extracts, the establishment of a community garden and business planning discussions. Aboriginal community members are actively involved in the planning and implementation of all project activities. Some give their time voluntarily while others, primarily elders, are paid as part-time research officers.

Initiated in May 2002, a series of meetings and workshops conducted over a 12-month period comprised planning for the Titjikala P4P project, a strategy that ensured that there was ample time for discussion and decision making. The planning procedures were conducted by a research team composed of Titjikala community and administration staff members and various experts with knowledge and skills of relevance to the project aims. An Aboriginal community leader who is the CEO of an Aboriginal community group from Western Australia, the Ngalia Community, with which P4P was developing a similar project also contributed to the planning discussions, a networking approach that has been mutually advantageous for both communities. At the outset a Council of Elders was formed to provide overall direction and community control of the project. Traditional owners and other community elders comprise the council which has met formally on three occasions since 2001. The first meeting was to consider the concept of conducting a cultural revitalisation and enterprise development project, the second to endorse the proposed activities and the proposed engagement arrangements with the host university, and the third meeting called to review progress and endorse new project objectives. This 'bottom-up' approach has ensured that the community have

ownership over the project and overall control of project activities.

The initial workshop discussions focussed on developing an agreement concerning how the project was to be conducted and on the benefit sharing arrangements that were to be established. This was not a 'prior informed consent' approach, in that the community members and university research staff worked in partnership to decide the terms of engagement and benefit sharing approach as opposed to the university team presenting the community with a predetermined proposal. A research agreement, outlining guidelines for ethical research and education activities conducted by the Titjikala Community in partnership with P4P, was developed by the project team and endorsed by both the Council of Elders and the Tapatjatjaka Community Government Council (TCGC), an elected body of community representatives responsible for the general administration of the community and charged with the authority to enter into legal arrangements with outside agencies. Following community endorsement formalities, the agreement was subsequently ratified and signed by TCGC and by Curtin University as the collaborating partner in the research project. The overarching philosophy of the agreement, the wording of which was based on an agreement first produced by the Ngalia community (K. Muir, pers. comm.) and provided to the project team and to the TCGC to guide them in their discussions and deliberations, is described in two opening statements in the agreement: (1) All projects will seek a partnership approach, engaging community members in all levels of the project, with the aim to include the best of Indigenous knowledge with the best of western science; and (2) The Tapatjatjaka Community Government Council (TCGC) will not approve the research activities of any individuals or organizations that lead to, or in its opinion are likely to lead to, offending Indigenous people living in or connected with the Titjikala Community. Therefore the TCGC will only approve those research activities that respect, privilege, benefit and empower Indigenous people living in or connected with the Titjikala Community.

This philosophy has directly guided all projects conducted to date with the Titjikala Community. A consistent feature of the interactions between the non-Aboriginal members of the project team with their Aboriginal counterparts has been the honouring of and respect for traditional knowledge about plants and their uses. This gradually turned into an automatic and genuine response of the non-Aboriginal participants as they were increasingly exposed to the wealth and depth of knowledge revealed during the workshops, field trips and general discussions. The consequence of this approach has been a noticeable enhancement in self esteem and self-confidence of the Aboriginal elders involved in the project, an outcome that has made a significant contribution to their involvement in a recent economic initiative — the entering into a joint venture with a cultural tourism company (see Figure 1).

GUNYA-TITJIKALA CULTURAL TOURISM JOINT VENTURE

A successful example of enterprise development by an Australian Aboriginal community is the Gunya-Titjikala tourism business operating at the Titjikala Community in Central Australia. The Titjikala Community is a remote Indigenous community located south of Alice Springs in the Central Remote Region. The community was formed in the early 1950s through relocation of Luritja, Pitjantjatjara and Arrernte people that is currently home to between 250 and 300 people with 40 per cent of community members under the age of 25. In 2002, the community decided to collaborate with Curtin University in developing the P4P project. Empowerment through honouring and respecting TEK and capacity building for talking with tourists about TEK was a direct outcome of project activities. In 2005, the Titjikala community entered into a joint venture with Gunya Tours to build three luxury tents as a site adjacent to the Titjikala townsite. Tourists pay over $1,000 (AUS) per night to stay in the tents and talk with community members. The community members participate in the business in various ways, including acting as tour guides, a skill that was developed in the P4P project. This business venture is proving to be financially viable and expansion plans are under consideration.

The research agreement also contained clauses relating to intellectual property rights of the research partners. Two of these clauses stated that

Figure 1   Gunya-Titjikala tourist enterprise

Photo courtesy David Callow.

New Intellectual Property generated through research work conducted by the research team, including all copyright and neighbouring rights, all rights in relation to inventions (including patent rights), plant varieties, registered and unregistered trademarks (including service marks), registered designs, trade secrets and know how and circuit layouts, and all other rights resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields will be described as part of the project, and commercial application of such knowledge will be negotiated by the signatories of this agreement (Clause 9.2) and that Ongoing Indigenous ownership of the cultural and intellectual property rights in the material on which the research is based should be acknowledged (Clause 9.3).

It was later decided that these clauses, along with similar clauses in the project schedule agreement with the project funding agency, the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DK-CRC), did not provide adequate protection of the rights of the TCGC over new intellectual property that might be generated by P4P project activities, in particular the knowledge generated

through laboratory investigations of medicinal properties of local plants selected for study by Aboriginal elders. Consultations between community and project members, the DK-CRC, and a government funded Aboriginal agency, the Central Land Council, resulted in the development of a new project schedule. In essence, the new schedule ensures that the Titjikala Community will be legally represented at any negotiations relating to IP arising out of the project, and that the community would be entitled to an equal share of the collective commercial return to project partners arising from the new IP generated by project activities.

The approach taken in the P4P-Titjikala project has been a significant factor in the economic achievements of the Titjikala community. Key success factors in the project have been empowerment through partnership and respect, mentoring and networking activities. While P4P was not involved in the negotiations that led to the establishment of the joint venture company operating the cultural tourism business, the experience and self confidence gained by community members through participating in P4P workshops, field trips and planning discussions have been identified as an important contributing factor to

the development and operation of the business enterprise. Current initiatives are aimed at assisting entrepreneurial members of the community to develop micro-enterprises based on traditional knowledge about plants and their uses.

CONCLUSION

Participation in commercial enterprises by Aboriginal Australians is being actively supported by Australian government agencies, NGOs and other support groups. Aboriginal people are becoming involved in a range of enterprises in such diverse areas as commercial property investment, mining and mine services, transport, manufacturing, retail and services, agriculture, fisheries, tourism and financial services. Despite this growing trend a lack of effective business models to promote for enterprise development that are suitable for Aboriginal groups, whether they be family or community based, currently hinders expansion. Research is required to address this and other knowledge gaps so as to enhance the active participation of Aboriginal people in the Australian economy.

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