

Report

70

2011

Desert Services that Work:

Demand-responsive approaches to
desert settlements

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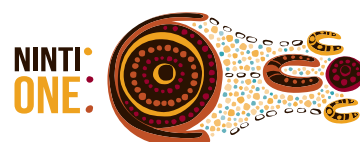
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Desert Knowledge CRC Report Number 70

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ISBN: 978 1 74158 191 5 (Online copy)

ISSN: 1832 6684

Citation

Fisher S, Elvin R, McFallan S, Memmott P, O'Rourke T, Peter S, Porter R, Stanley O, Sullivan P, Tedmanson D and Young M. 2011. *Desert Services that Work: Demand-responsive approaches to desert settlements*. DKCRC Research Report 70. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.

The Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (2003–2010) was an unincorporated joint venture with 28 partners whose mission was to develop and disseminate an understanding of sustainable living in remote desert environments, deliver enduring regional economies and livelihoods based on Desert Knowledge, and create the networks to market this knowledge in other desert lands. The work reported in this publication was supported by funding from the Australian Government Cooperative Research Centres Program through the Desert Knowledge CRC. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Desert Knowledge CRC or its Participants.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of Dr Maria V Rodrigues in providing background research support to the preparation of this report. Murray McGregor provided support and encouragement to the team during the process and we thank him for his contribution.

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List of shortened forms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACGC	Anmatjere Community Government Council
AIATSIS	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ANU	Australian National University
APHCRI	Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CAT	Centre for Appropriate Technology
CATSI Act	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2007 (Commonwealth)
CCT	Clinical Care Trials (NT)
CDEP	Community Development Employment Project
CKAO	Combined Kimberly Aboriginal Organisations
CLC	Central Land Council
CP5	Core Project 5
CPP	Community Phones Project
CSC	Cloncurry Shire Council
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DBERD	Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Technology
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DKCRC	Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre
DPIFM	Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FRDC	Federal Race Discrimination Commissioner
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Council
ICC	Indigenous Coordination Centre
ICHO	Indigenous Community Housing Organisation
IHANT	Indigenous Housing Authority of the Northern Territory
KPI	key performance indicators
KWHB	Katherine West Health Board
MU	Murdoch University
NGO	non-government organisation
NPARSD	National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery
NT	Northern Territory
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
OATSIH	Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
OIPC	Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
ORIC	Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations
PBI	public benevolent institution
Qld	Queensland
RPA	Regional Partnership Agreement
RSDA	Regional Service Delivery Agreements
SA	South Australia
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
SCU	Southern Cross University
SIHIP	Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program
SRA	Shared Responsibility Agreements
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UniSA	University of South Australia
UQ	University of Queensland
USO	Universal Service Obligation
WA	Western Australia

Executive summary

A service is the process by which individuals, households and communities gain access to goods and facilities that they require to live and work. As such, services address a wide range of needs from water and power to law and justice programs, education, road maintenance and almost any provision requiring specialist skills and work to meet the needs of users of services.

The research conducted by DKCRC through the project Desert Services that Work and described in this report aims to address five research questions:

1. What are characteristics of the interplay between demand and supply of services, according to the perceptions of consumers and service providers engaged at the local interface?
2. What are the conditions that permit successful practice to develop between consumers and service providers?
3. At what scales of governance should different service delivery functions be assigned to optimise both demand and supply based criteria?
4. What are the priorities of consumers for service type and delivery style within a specified budget framework, and what is their capacity to participate in and willingness to contribute to services?
5. What are the critical issues and strategies to improve the service system, including the strengths and weaknesses of different technology and governance options?

The report draws on research conducted by researchers from eight of the DKCRC partner organisations: the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), University of Queensland (UQ), University of South Australia (UniSA), Murdoch University (MU), The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), CSIRO and James Cook University (subsequently Charles Darwin University). The Centre for Appropriate Technology is the lead agency for the project. The research was supplemented by the work of three PhD students.

Research carried out by partners to DKCRC focused on the following subjects:

- Local government and housing reform in the Northern Territory
- The Myuma initiative, western Queensland
- The management of demand and supply of water in Dajarra, western Queensland
- The implementation of the PY Ku Rural Transaction Centres program in South Australia
- The boundaries of Martu representation in services, Western Australia
- The Regional Partnership Agreement in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands
- System modelling for services in health and housing
- The Community Phones Project

In essence, the project was developed to test the assumption that services that are responsive to user demand will be more effective as they are better aligned with user needs and behaviours. The project aimed to identify the factors that contribute to hold back the demand responsiveness of services to remote settlements of Aboriginal people. In doing so, we make observations on the mismatch between supply-side activities and demand-side realities, the gap in understanding between service providers and service users, discontinuity of planning and process, behaviours of actors within the service system and the over-reliance on individuals with particular skills and knowledge to make the system function. We build an analysis of policy and practice in engagement between service providers (especially government agencies) and Aboriginal people that underpins our responses to the research questions.

Across the various activities that make up the project as a whole, we developed schematic service models and a typology of service delivery types. We elaborated a set of ten principles of effective desert services. The report presents summaries of case studies and examples of service models, settings and approaches that are described in full in the individual research publications. The importance of systems analysis, service settings and the long-term role of services in community plans are emphasised.

The report goes on to recommend approaches to addressing issues identified through the research. These focus on the need for sophisticated processes of engagement between service providers and users. They also point to approaches to evaluation, learning, planning and monitoring of services that offer scope for further development.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Services cover every aspect of life: housing, water, phones, power, roads, rubbish, health, education and more, meaning most of the necessities of modern living. In desert settlements these services come from governments, Aboriginal organisations and private companies, but distance, local conditions, communication challenges and other factors often mean that getting the best from them is difficult and can be extremely complex. Problems of access to services are endemic in desert Australia. Old hands might justifiably argue that the underlying issues have been around for a long time and unresolved for just as long.

The research described in this report originated during the development of the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DKCRC), when partners to the bid to the Commonwealth identified shortcomings in access to services as a key issue affecting the ability of people in desert Australia to achieve their aspirations to live and work in a sustainable way. The concept of demand-responsive services came from the work of the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT), which had developed its thinking in this area through the experience of working with Aboriginal people over some twenty-five years. CAT was particularly influenced by its research in the field of water and concepts of demand-responsive water services that emerged from the United Nations Water Decade of the Nineties (Black 1998).

Being demand responsive means much more than service providers arriving at a better-informed estimate of what a community requires. The concept also goes beyond the development of better ways in which communities can interact with service providers. Demand responsiveness means access to services both to meet the broader needs of Aboriginal people and with clear-sightedness about their capacity to make the best use of a service for their particular needs. In short, it means services at a level that can be used effectively and the benefits maximised with the skills and assets available locally.

The Desert Services that Work project addresses the second of the DKCRC proposed outcomes: ‘sustainable remote desert settlements that support the presence of desert people, particularly remote Aboriginal communities, as a result of improved and efficient governance and access to services’. Figure 1.1 shows the strategic basis for the project and its contribution to this outcome.

Discussion and debate, research and commentary on the best way for access to services to be improved has existed for as long as people have lived in remote settlements. In conducting the work that is the subject of this report, we are conscious of the efforts of those people who have come before and the many individuals who work in a committed and skilful way to achieve the best possible results from remote services in this country.

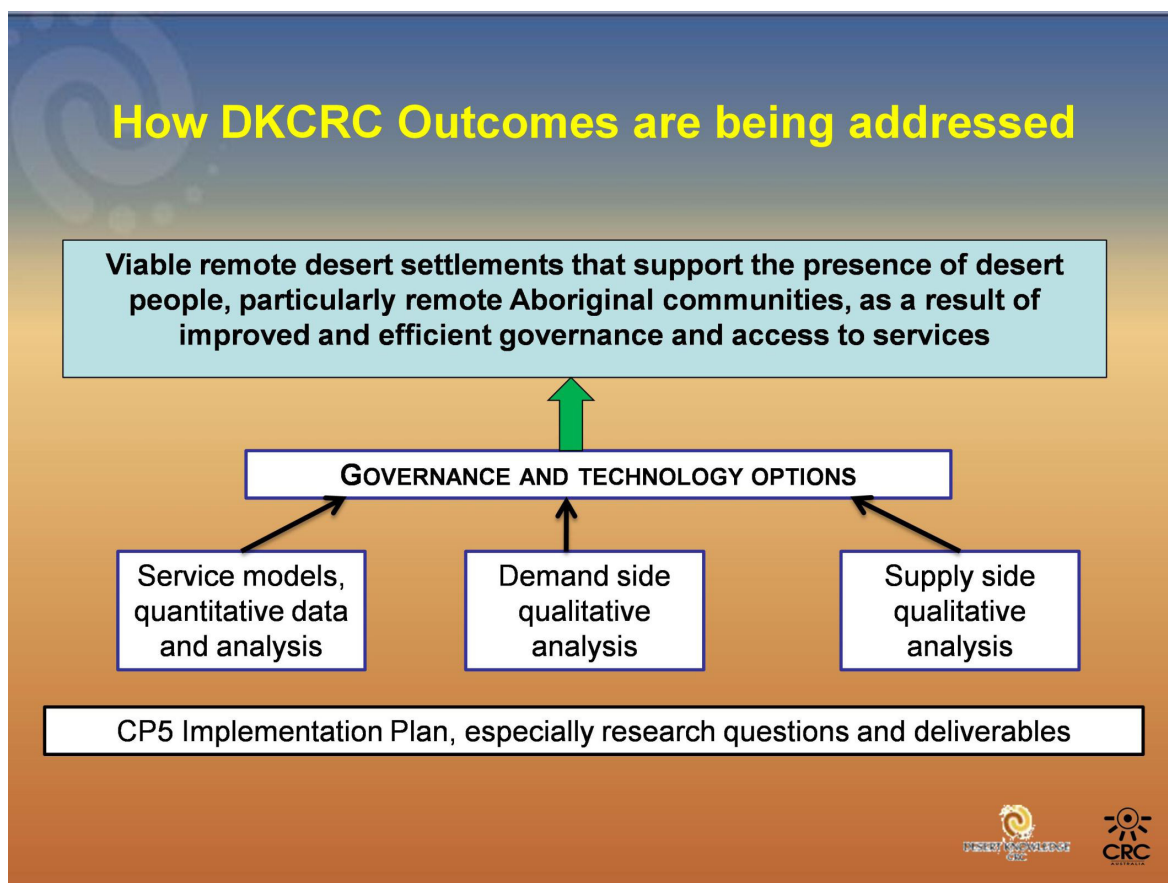


Figure 1.1: The way that the Desert Services that Work project addresses the overall outcomes of DKCRC

1.2 The first phase of research on Desert Services that Work

The Desert Services that Work research as a whole began in January 2006 and concluded in December 2009. The period of work covered by this report is from February 2008 to December 2009. From 2006 until 2008 the project leader was Mark Moran and the report of project work completed in that period is provided in Moran et al. 2009.

The transition between the end of the first period of research and the start of the second period represented by this report did not occur on a single date. Some research begun during the first period continued into the second and was completed early during that term, with published reports following.

In the case of research with Martu people in Western Australia, Murdoch University was the partner that conducted the research. Its involvement as a partner to DKCRC finished with the completion of the research in September 2008 (McGrath et al. 2010). The results of that research are cited in this synthesis report. The researchers are not co-authors of this report.

Similarly, the first phase of research by the Centre for Appropriate Technology on the Shared Responsibility Agreement at Ali Curung was completed during the first phase, but publication has been finalised during the second phase (Wright et al. 2011). So again, there was an overlap between work undertaken across the two phases of the Desert Services that Work project. This synthesis report draws on that research and cites it. The author, Alyson Wright, is not a co-author of the synthesis report.

Finally, Andrew Crouch of the Centre for Appropriate Technology contributed a paper on the experience of the Community Phones Project that is the basis for Section 5.5. of this report (Crouch 2009).

We wish to acknowledge these individuals with thanks for their skilful work and its contribution to the overall project.

1.3 Purpose

This document is the final report for the project. It provides an overall synthesis of the findings drawn from the individual research activities in each jurisdiction, together with cross-cutting work such as that on service modelling and replication of services.

In reporting on the results of the research, we provide in this publication a summary of the background, context and methods used in each research activity for the purpose of the overall synthesis. In doing so, we have sought to achieve a balance between providing sufficient information on individual research activities to support the overall findings but not including detail that is not directly relevant to the synthesis. Detailed reports from each location are available from DKCRC or through the website www.desertknowledgecsrc.com.au.

Comprehensive responses are provided against each of the research questions defined in Moran et al. (2009). We then go on to identify the key findings from the research as a whole and finish with conclusions designed to inform policy and practice in desert services in Australia.

1.4 Research questions

The researchers in Core Project 5 – Desert Services that Work: Demand Responsive Services to Desert Settlements – addressed five research questions at sites across arid-zone Australia:

1. What are characteristics of the interplay between demand and supply of services, according to the perceptions of consumers and service providers engaged at the local interface?
2. What are the conditions that permit successful practice to develop between consumers and service providers?
3. At what scales of governance should different service delivery functions be assigned to optimise both demand and supply based criteria?
4. What are the priorities of consumers for service type and delivery style within a specified budget framework, and what is their capacity to participate in and willingness to contribute to services?
5. What are the critical issues and strategies to improve the service system, including the strengths and weaknesses of different technology and governance options?

These questions were originally developed at the design stage for the research and then reviewed by the Steering Group in November 2007, leading to the final wording provided above.

1.5 Key definitions

A **service** is the process by which individuals, households and communities gain access to goods and facilities that they require to live and work. As such, services address a wide range of needs from water and power to law and justice programs, education, road maintenance and almost any provision requiring specialist skills and work to meet the needs of users of services. **Desert services** are those services used by people living in arid areas of Australia.

Drawing on the earlier work of the project, there are several other key definitions that are relevant to the research described in this report. **Demand responsiveness** is a principle in the functioning of economic markets, describing the speed and extent to which the demand for a good or service is met by the supply of that good or service.

In considering the interaction between demand and supply, ‘boundaries are not at all clear in this context, which makes the notion of a single interface misleading. The dynamics at play are better conceptualised as multidirectional interactions across **multiple interfaces**’ (Moran et al. 2009, p. 19).

In fact, it could be argued – and is reflected in the research questions for Desert Services that Work – that ‘instead of the notion of a single interface between suppliers and consumers, the notion of **governance** better encapsulates the array of actors and activities that occur over a broad range of institutional positions and scales. In the local context of remote Aboriginal settlements, governance includes managerial, administrative and operational processes that deal with outside agencies and interests. Governance is an omnibus concept that encompasses diverse scales, interactions, relationships, processes, structures and traditions that determine how power operates, how decisions are made and how beneficiaries participate’ (Moran et al. 2009, p. 20).

We define **informed demand** as ‘an informed expression of need for a particular service in a context of limited resources, in consideration of the tradeoffs that consumers are prepared to make to receive the service, and where opportunity costs are weighed against benefits’ (Moran 2008, p. 6).

The Year One Report for the project also describes the principle of **subsidiarity**, ‘which holds that government should undertake only those initiatives that exceed the capacity of individuals or private groups acting independently. It is often stated as the principle of decision making as close to the level of the individual citizen as is appropriate for the circumstances’ (Sullivan 2006, p. 25 in Moran et al. 2009, p. 31).

Accountability has been defined by Mulgan (2002, p. 3) as a ‘relationship in which one party, the holder of accountability, has the right to seek information about, to investigate and to scrutinise the actions of another party, the giver of accountability’. As Moran et al. state, ‘accountability thus implies both a measure of answerability (providing a clear account for actions undertaken) and enforceability (punishments or sanctions for shortfalls in performance)’ (2009, p. 34).

Finally, service ‘end users often express their demands indirectly through “third-party” intermediaries: relations, community leaders and **trusted outsiders**. These people then effectively represent the demands to service providers’ (Moran et al. 2009, p. 19).

1.6 Partners

Project researchers came from eight of the DKCRC partner organisations:

- The Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT)
- University of Queensland (UQ)
- University of South Australia (UniSA)
- Murdoch University (MU)
- The Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
- James Cook University (subsequently Charles Darwin University)

The Centre for Appropriate Technology was the lead agency for the project.

In addition, three PhD students carried out research for their theses through the project. They were based at Southern Cross University (SCU), the Australian National University (ANU) and UQ.

During its first period of work up until late 2008, the project was supported by a Steering Group, made up of representatives across the range of people engaged in Aboriginal affairs, including Aboriginal leaders and entrepreneurs and non-Aboriginal government officers and service providers. Members of the Steering Group were:

- Dennis Bree (subsequently Leon Morris), Northern Territory Government
- Belinda Collins, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), Australian Government
- Lucy Lester, Port Augusta, South Australia
- Pauline Peel, Queensland Government
- Howard Pedersen, Western Australia Government
- Doug Porter, World Bank
- Peter Renehan, Centre for Appropriate Technology, Alice Springs, Northern Territory
- Tim Rowse, Australian National University (subsequently University of Western Sydney)
- Colin Saltmere, Myuma Pty Ltd, Queensland
- Brian Samson, Jigalong Aboriginal Community, Western Australia.

Two meetings of the Steering Group took place during the first half of the project, the meeting in Alice Springs in November 2007 taking the form of a review of progress to inform the next phase of research. Subsequently, contact with individual members was by email or through individual meetings.

1.7 Research activities

During its term, the project Desert Services that Work conducted research in Western Australia (WA), Queensland (Qld), South Australia (SA) and the Northern Territory (NT) (see Figure 1.2 for research sites). Research outputs include a range of working papers, articles, reports and videos that are available on the DKCRC website (www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au).

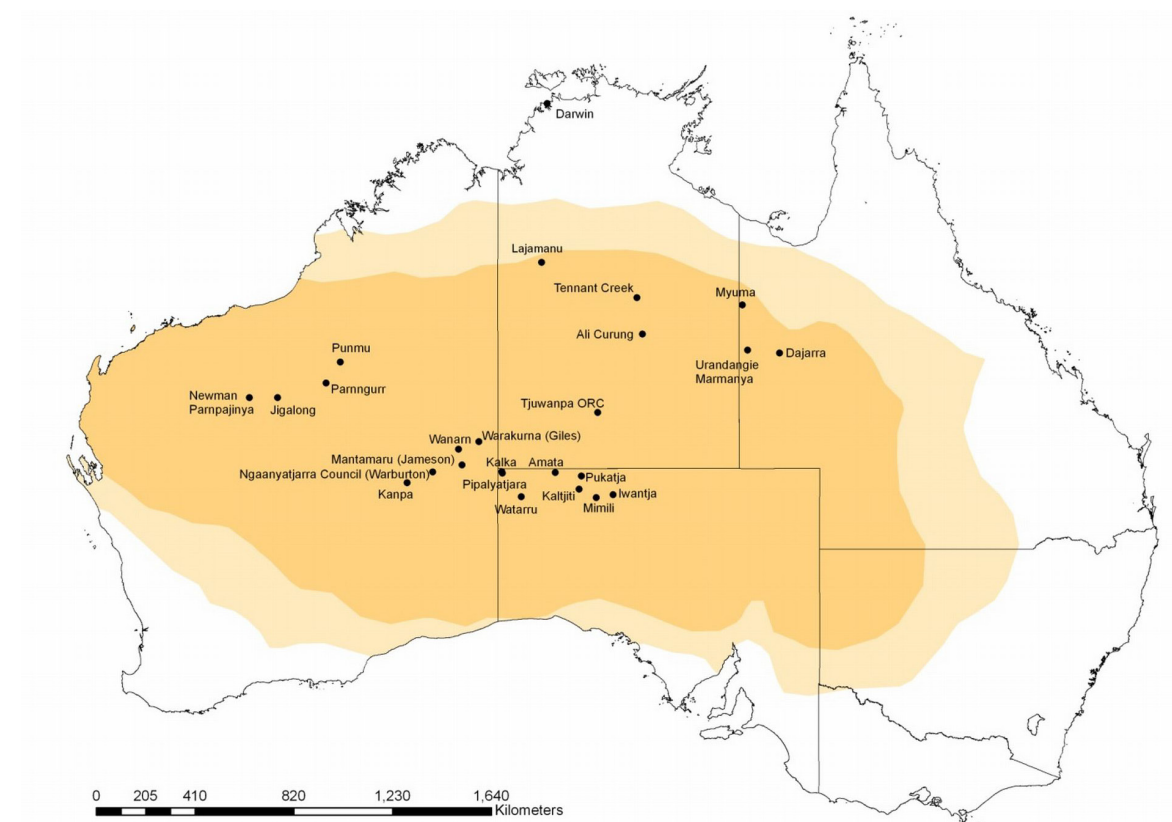


Figure 1.2: Research locations for Desert Services that Work

Research projects were conducted through fieldwork at particular locations or as overall contributions to the research outcomes through desk-based work. We summarise the research undertaken as follows:

- Local government and housing reform in the NT: the implementation of new NT Government models of housing tenancy and asset management and their interface with tenant demand (CAT)
- The Community Phones Project (NT): an analysis of lessons learned and insights from the community phones project that are relevant to demand-responsive services (CAT)
- Myuma Pty Ltd, Western Queensland: a study of the Myuma initiative, the conditions that contribute to its effectiveness and the potential for replication (UQ)
- Water in Dajarra, Western Queensland: the management of demand and supply of water with particular focus on addressing historical problems with quality and quantity of water (UQ)
- Energy and water use assessment in dwellings in Dajarra (UQ)
- The boundaries of Martu representation in service in the East Pilbara and Western Desert areas of Western Australia (MU)
- Evaluation of PY Ku Rural Transaction Centres program (UniSA)
- Evaluation of the Regional Partnership Agreement in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and related Shared Responsibility Agreements (AIATSIS)
- System modelling for services in health and housing (CSIRO)
- Aboriginal engagement in the context of services to remote outstations in Central Australia (SCU PhD)
- Representing Others: Aboriginal senior officials in the self-governing Northern Territory (ANU PhD)
- Delivering healthy housing to Aboriginal communities in remote north-west Queensland (UQ PhD)

1.8 Research approvals

Approval to conduct the research in each location was secured through application to the relevant ethics approval committee.

1.9 Limitations on the research

Although the focus of the research questions encourages qualitative research, we sought to introduce quantitative analysis wherever relevant. However, access to consistent quantitative data that would enable comparative analysis between services and settlements over a sufficient period of time proved difficult.

It is often said that the turnover of staff in government agencies and community organisations is one of the major barriers to achieving effective services because new staff have to learn processes, need to establish relationships and bring their own perspective on the way work should be done, requiring service users to accommodate new approaches. Of course, in an ideal world of established systems and procedures, changes in personnel ought to make little noticeable difference. But in the realities of services that rely on the skills of a small number of individuals and given the centrality of interpersonal relationships and communication to remote services, they make a big difference. In the research team, we were able to manage changes in researchers during the project without any major setbacks to the project as a whole. But staff changes in government and community organisations had a greater impact as we found from time to time that key contacts had moved on to new jobs or relocated to other parts of the country.

In some locations, local people expressed fatigue with research. They considered it to be too far removed from actually solving problems and were tired of talking about the history and the challenges of remote living and remote services. Housing is a subject that has been covered extensively by the Australian media and so was more prone to research fatigue than, for example, remote transaction centres. Overall, a small number of individuals and families did not participate in the research, but this did not cause significant limitations to the research. We wish to acknowledge the high level of commitment and support shown by all participants and respondents to the work we did in each location.

Research in the Northern Territory was undertaken during a period of extraordinary change to policy and programs affecting Aboriginal people. This included the ongoing roll-out of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, the signing and implementation of National Partnerships on Indigenous Reform, Indigenous Housing and Remote Service Delivery and local government, tenancy management and land tenure reform. As a result large investments were being directed by government towards remote areas of the Territory and new approaches to the dispensing of such funds. This included an alliance approach to building and refurbishing remote Aboriginal housing stock.

The immensity of these changes was challenging, both for community residents trying to grapple with the layers of change likely to impact on their lives and for the capacity of governments at all levels to deliver. As the research was undertaken over a twelve-month period it was anticipated that the on-the-ground implementation of the changes underway would be significantly well advanced for impacts to be tracked. However, as noted in the Federal Government review of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) undertaken in August 2009 in response to concerns about the slow delivery of houses, high administrative costs and the over-bureaucratic nature of program governance, significant delays were encountered (Australian Government 2009). These relate to both the complexity of the approach utilised and the capacity of governments and bureaucracies to accelerate progress across multiple and complex but interrelated agendas.

1.10 Work with communities

It is a truism repeated often that building relationships of mutual trust is fundamental to effective work with Aboriginal people. For the team that worked on Desert Services that Work, the need to invest in building trust and rapport was central to the approach we took to all the research. In fact, the effectiveness of the research was entirely dependent on it.

In many cases, individual researchers had established relationships of trust and mutual respect with local people through previous projects or through research conducted during the first period of this project. This was particularly the case in Dajarra, with the Myuma Group, with people on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands and the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and in Ali Curung and Lajamanu. In other locations, relationships were built through the project itself.

Our practice in working with communities was led by the following key principles:

- Seeking and waiting for invitations, usually through formal community decision-making processes
- Meeting as many people as was necessary to build up the various perspectives and stories that enabled as full an understanding of local perspectives and experiences of services as possible
- Establishing a pace and timing for the work that suited local people, ensuring that visits did not disrupt important local events and that the research did not take attention away from other community priorities
- Communicating in a way that was appropriate to the situation, especially demonstrating respect for local ways of conducting meetings, active listening, using plain English and showing patience. Also avoiding talking too much and being too demanding in describing the needs of the research
- Being open to requests for other assistance that may have been indirectly linked to our purposes for being there, but were important to the community. This included, for example, providing advice on customer service in transaction centres or discussing the location of air conditioning units or water tanks. This is sometimes known as ‘surfing the issue’, meaning that the researchers need to allow for diversions and other priorities to appear, rather than expecting to focus immediately and directly on the research topic
- Spending time getting to know people in the community and not always being directly engaged in the research itself.

1.11 Community researchers

1.11.1. Purpose and objectives

The project employed community researchers in four locations: Martu communities in Western Australia, Ali Curung and Lajamanu in the Northern Territory, and Dajarra in Western Queensland. Community researchers are people who live in the communities that were the focus of the research. They were employed with the aims of:

1. Providing advice and guidance on aspects of the research, especially on approaches to collecting data
2. Enabling good communication to be achieved between the research teams and local people on the purpose of the research
3. Collecting data and contributing to its analysis.

In addition, the value of training and supporting local people to contribute to the research was important as a source of employment and income to them, as well as personal development.

Community researchers who contributed to Desert Services that Work were:

Ali Curung	Lajamanu	Dajarra	Newman/Parnpajinya
Savannah Long	Zena Kelly	Keith Marshall	Neville Taylor
Rosie Holmes	Denicia Luther	Henry Dempsey	Leonie Attwood
Janet Simpson	Kylie Patrick	Mick Marshall	
Martha Poulson	Tanya Hargreaves		
Jacqueline Robertson	Natasha Robertson		
	Matrina Robertson		

1.11.2. The practice of community researchers

The experience of the team at the Centre for Appropriate Technology provides further insight into the way in which community researchers contributed to their work. In Ali Curung and Lajamanu, the employment of community researchers was a key strategy in the research for ensuring that the views and perspectives of local residents are authentically captured in a manner that enhances the validity of the research and the benefit arising from research participation. As most of the householders interviewed speak English as a second or third language, the use of community researchers to both facilitate interviews and provide interpretation and translations as needed was considered essential. In a political climate where many Aboriginal people, particularly in the NT, are feeling that they have not been appropriately consulted or engaged in the array of changes affecting many aspects of their lives, research processes that prioritised listening and time to talk in language was considered paramount. On a more tangible level, the employment of community researchers ensured that the nature of benefit arising from participating in the research was both immediate (employment for local residents) as well as long term.

As has been noted in earlier DKCRC research (Rea & Young 2006), the roles that can be undertaken by community researchers can range from involvement in research governance and facilitation to undertaking the data collection. Distinct roles for community researchers emerged in each of the communities with such roles generally aligning with the types of roles that individuals would be expected to fulfil given their cultural seniority or educational achievement. In Ali Curung two senior women undertook the roles of community researchers, providing research direction and facilitation, providing mentoring to the non-Aboriginal researchers, providing interpreting and translation where necessary and acting as a sounding board for researchers about the emerging findings. In Lajamanu a total of six relatively young women were identified to assist in the research, with different individuals

available to assist during each of the three surveys. They undertook interviews themselves, completed survey forms, provided advice on question rephrasing and provided interpretation when required. Of critical importance to the community and the young women themselves was the provision of paid employment through the research. It was apparent after the first round of interviews that the paid work experience provided through the research project was acting as a pathway to other employment for the individuals involved.

The engagement of community researchers over the three phases of interviewing enabled researchers to develop strong relationships with residents and establish a sense of continuity between data collection rounds. Community researchers were also important in ensuring that research findings were disseminated within the communities. In addition, formal reports were given at Local Advisory Board meetings and a community newsletter outlining research findings was distributed to Board members. This was critically important in maintaining respectful relationships with senior members of each community and in ensuring that the conduct of the research embraces the principles of research merit, integrity and beneficence.

1.11.3. Key factors in work with community researchers

In Dajarra, community researchers performed a similar role as they did in the Northern Territory. Their particular contribution was a short video on the perspectives of residents of Dajarra on the water problem (Jimberella Cooperative 2010), but they also collected information through interviews, provided advice and knowledge on the history of water problems in the township and were closely engaged in the work throughout its course.

With Martu people, it proved valuable for the lead researcher to have regular meetings with the two community researchers. Responding to guidance and support, they were then able to collect a significant proportion of the data required from local residents as well as assist in the analysis and interpretation of that information.

The Centre for Appropriate Technology's engagement of community researchers in each of the research communities is underpinned by a number of factors. First, the lead organisation for the project has a long history of undertaking effective and responsive engagement with Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory. The organisation is known for the services it has provided and continues to provide to communities across the Territory in a range of areas including training, technical support and bush products. The ability to leverage from this reputation was critical in securing early support from the communities for the research project.

Second, the lead field researcher for CAT had significant experience in working with Aboriginal communities and a strong understanding of cultural protocols, the importance of sitting down and talking with people on their terms and in places of their preference, and a keen ability to adapt processes for achieving the outcomes required (in this case, completing the surveys) to align with community expectations and need. For example, once senior people from one community had identified potential community researchers for the project, significant effort was invested in building skills in undertaking the interviews (asking questions and scribing), in valuing the community researchers' comments on the appropriateness of questions and changing questions if requested and in seeking their guidance on the selection of appropriate householder interviewees. In this community the community researchers continued interviewing residents after the field researcher had left the community, and faxed completed questionnaires as well as time sheets and bank details for payment. As the community researchers also had a range of other responsibilities to fulfil on a daily basis, to children and family, mobile phones were used to arrange meeting times and pick-up places on an as-needs basis, thus allowing minimal interference with day-to-day life and obligations.

Third, the methodological design of the research was grounded in developing an understanding of what was important to the householders as well as information about broader program and policy changes. Thus, interviews with householders began by eliciting the ‘house story’, of talking about family and kin, and thus foregrounded the importance of developing trust and relationships between the researchers and community residents. The interview process prioritised the importance of listening and understanding first before moving on to eliciting commentary about changes to housing tenancy and asset management. Repeat interviews, spanning a twelve-month period, although with intermittent phone contact in between visits, enhanced relationship building and offered a stark contrast to the spate of increasingly frequent short visits by government and other agencies as the Northern Territory Emergency Response activities continued and housing reform was scaled up.

Towards the end of the first period of work of Desert Services that Work, in October 2007, we invited the community researcher group as a whole to come together for a two-day workshop in Alice Springs that also included DKCRC researchers. On the way from Queensland, the Dajarra group visited Ali Curung to learn about the community and the work of the researchers there. The workshop enabled an exchange of experiences and knowledge to take place and training to be conducted for the community researchers.

1.12 Work with service providers

The work that researchers undertook with service providers occurred in three ways:

1. Meetings with State, Territory and Commonwealth government staff: In most cases, these were directed towards specific topics relating to research at each location (such as housing reform, water services or law and justice) and were designed to explore the decision-making processes and policy background to service planning and implementation. But sometimes we met with government staff, especially at senior level, in order to discuss emerging findings of the research and to receive feedback from them. This included two round-table meetings with staff of the Department of Communities in Queensland, a review meeting on the PY Ku program, a session with the FaHCSIA manager of the implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (NPARSD) and a series of meetings with senior officials in the Northern Territory Government.
2. Contributions to policy processes: In particular, we received documentation and provided commentary in writing and through participation in teleconferences held by the Remote Service Delivery Sub-Group of the Indigenous Working Group of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The work of this group led to the NPARSD in late 2008.
3. Interactions with implementing agencies of government or private contractors, either through the fieldwork or by seeking particular information: Contact with staff of Bushlight and the Community Phones Project, both managed by CAT, are examples. The close collaboration we enjoyed with Myuma Pty Ltd, PY Media and Jimberella Housing Cooperative, as well as interactions with local Aboriginal organisations in each jurisdiction, are others.

Overall, the need to establish good working relationships with service providers was fundamental to the research as we sought to ensure that it was grounded firmly in an understanding of the challenges for service providers in translating policy and resources into results.

1.13 Research outputs

During the period of research of Desert Services that Work covered by this report, the following research outputs were produced (available at www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au):

Crouch A. 2009. *The community phone project: An overview*. DKCRC Working Paper 46. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.

- Elvin R, Peter S, Porter R and Young M. 2010. *Discordance, mobility and agency: Dilemmas for housing reform in Northern Territory Aboriginal settlements*. DKCRC Research Report 76. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Elvin R. 2009. *Local government reform in the Northern Territory: reforming the governance of service delivery and the view from the Barkly*. DKCRC Working Paper 41. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Fisher S. 2011. *A development approach to remote services in Australia*. DKCRC Working Paper 78. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- Fisher S and Rola-Rubzen M. 2011. *More than a drop in the ocean: How can good examples of remote services be replicated?* DKCRC Working Paper 79. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- Ganter E. 2010. *An Ambivalent Hospitality: Aboriginal senior public servants and the representation of others in Australia's self-governing Northern Territory*. PhD thesis. College of Arts and Social Sciences, School of History, ANU. Canberra.
- Godwin J. forthcoming. *Delivering Healthy Housing to Aboriginal Communities in Remote North West Queensland*. PhD thesis. Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, Department of Architecture, The University of Queensland.
- Jimberella Cooperative. 2010. *Water in Dajarra*. Desert Knowledge CRC: 27'46". Video produced with Tim O'Rourke of the University of Queensland.
- Kennedy A. 2009. Understanding the 'understanding': Preliminary findings of Aboriginal perspectives on engagement with governments. *Centre for Remote Health Monthly Seminar Series*, Alice Springs. 29 May 2009, Alice Springs.
- Kennedy A. forthcoming. *Aboriginal engagement in the context of services to remote outstations in Central Australia*. PhD thesis. School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Southern Cross University. Coffs Harbour.
- McFallan S. 2010. *Software-based system model for housing and health*. Computer program. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- McFallan S, Stanley O and Fisher S. 2011. *Service provision – a complex system housing-health interface*. DKCRC Working Paper 80. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- McGrath N, Moran M and Anda M. 2010. *The boundaries of representation: Exploring the bordering of Martu governance in Australia*. DKCRC Working Paper 70. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Memmott P. 2010. *Demand-responsive services and culturally sustainable enterprise in remote Aboriginal settings: A Case Study of the Myuma Group*. DKCRC Research Report 63. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Ninti One. 2011. *Briefing paper: Desert Services that Work – the role and contribution of community researchers*. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- Ninti One. 2011. *Briefing paper: Desert Services that Work – principles of effective desert services*. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- O'Rourke T. 2011. *Delivering drinking water to Dajarra, north-west Queensland*. DKCRC Research Report 64. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- Porter R. 2009. *From community housing to public housing in Northern Territory remote Aboriginal communities: the policy context*. DKCRC Working Paper 44. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.

- Porter R. 2009. *Towards a hybrid model of public housing in Northern Territory remote Aboriginal communities?* DKCRC Working Paper 45. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Sullivan P. 2010. *Government processes and the effective delivery of services: the Ngaanyatjarra Council and its Regional Partnership Agreement.* DKCRC Working Paper 71. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Sullivan P. 2010. *The Aboriginal community sector and the effective delivery of services: Acknowledging the role of Indigenous sector organisations.* DKCRC Working Paper 73. Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Sullivan P. 2011. *The policy goal of normalisation, the national Indigenous reform agreement and Indigenous national partnerships agreements.* DKCRC Working Paper 76. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- Tedmanson D, Muirhead M and Fisher S. 2011. *'Anangu serving Anangu – Plenty Ninti!' The PY Ku Network on the APY Lands.* DKCRC Research Report 68. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.
- Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation and Kennedy A. 2008. *Submission to the Northern Territory Government Outstations Policy.* Desert Knowledge CRC, Alice Springs.
- Wright A, Desert Knowledge CRC and Centre for Appropriate Technology. 2011. *Ali Curung Shared Responsibility Agreement Evaluation: March 2007 – December 2008.* DKCRC Research Report 67. Ninti One Limited, Alice Springs.

All the outputs contribute in some way to the content of this final report, but it was the process of conducting the work in parallel in different locations in desert Australia, comparing notes and discussing issues as they arose through meetings, teleconferences and workshops that enhanced the content of the overall outputs from the project and especially this final report.

2. Literature on remote services

Within the individual research activities that make up Desert Services that Work, researchers conducted their own reviews of the relevant literature (see list of reports in 1.13 above). The review provided in this section focuses on literature of relevance to the overall synthesis of the results.

In approaching this review, we have focused on three key concepts that are reflected in the research questions: governance arrangements and subsidiarity, engagement between users and providers of services, and accountability for service performance.

2.1 Government agreements and policy papers

During the concluding stages of research within Desert Services that Work and the period of preparation of this report, the most important policy initiative relating to remote services was the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (COAG 2009). It was signed by COAG members at the end of 2008, and was established to:

Implement a new remote service delivery model that clearly identifies service standards, roles and responsibilities and service delivery parameters to ensure that Indigenous Australians living in selected remote communities receive and actively participate in services to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

(COAG 2009, p. 3)

The Agreement targets its investment to the following locations:

- a. the 15 larger major works communities in the Northern Territory already identified for significant housing and infrastructure investment under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program
- b. 4 locations in the Cape York and Gulf regions in Queensland
- c. 3 locations in Western Australia, with at least 2 locations in the Kimberley
- d. 2 locations in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia
- e. 2 remote locations in the Murdi Paaki region in western New South Wales.

(COAG 2009, p. 3)

The intention of the Agreement is to extend the work to other locations to be defined later.

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (known as the NPARSD) intends to contribute to the following objectives:

- a. Improve the access of Indigenous families to a full range of suitable and culturally inclusive services
- b. Raise the standard and range of services delivered to Indigenous families to be broadly consistent with those provided to other Australians in similar sized and located communities
- c. Improve the level of governance and leadership within Indigenous communities and Indigenous community organisations
- d. Provide simpler access and better coordinated government services for Indigenous people in identified communities
- e. Increase economic and social participation wherever possible, and promote personal responsibility, engagement and behaviours consistent with positive social norms.

(COAG 2009, p. 5)

In the locations specified within the Agreement, the NPARSD intends to contribute to the following outcomes:

- a. standards of services and infrastructure to be comparable with non-Indigenous communities of similar size, location and need elsewhere in Australia
- b. clear roles and responsibilities identified with all levels of government working together
- c. community organisations deliver government services that meet relevant legislative requirements and are accountable to their constituents and funding bodies
- d. improved access to services for Indigenous people in remote locations to support achievement of the COAG Targets. Ensuring:
 - (i) it is simpler to negotiate government services for Indigenous Australians
 - (ii) it is easier for Indigenous Australians to engage government services
 - (iii) user-friendly services are provided to Indigenous Australians by government
- e. better coordinated, consistent and connected government services and more highly developed capacity in Indigenous communities
- f. enhanced workforce planning including the development of local skills and a stable local workforce. (COAG 2009, p. 6)

The objectives and outcomes of the NPARSD are planned to be achieved through the following outputs:

- a. a new fully functional integrated service planning and delivery methodology and single government interface
- b. the completion of detailed baseline mapping of social and economic indicators, government investments, services and service gaps in each location
- c. detailed Local Implementation Plans developed and completed with State and Northern Territory governments and stakeholders in identified locations
- d. improvements in the design and delivery of services consistent with the Service Delivery Principles at Schedule C¹
- e. an agreed Bilateral Plan completed for each jurisdiction that is party to the Agreement
- f. reports as required by the Agreement. (COAG 2009, p. 6)

For the purposes of locating our research within the policy direction represented by the NPARSD and the other policy document relevant to our work, the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, the following observations are important:

- The concept of ‘whole of government’ approaches to services, which came to the fore in Aboriginal policy during the last Howard administration and led to COAG trials and the establishment of Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) are apparent in the intent of the NPARSD to set up a single government interface for service users, called Regional Operations Centres.
- The NPARSD provides a strategic basis for an improvement in services, meaning that it directs resources to areas considered to require additional support or that tend to fall outside the design of routine service delivery. This includes work that is largely associated with the process of planning design, developing and measuring service performance, with particular emphasis on the participation of service users. In this sense, the NPARSD could be said to be strengthening elements of the program cycle for services that have historically been neglected, such as engagement and evaluation.

¹ Schedule C sets out the seven service delivery principles – the Priority principle: Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs; the Indigenous engagement principle: Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services; Sustainability principle: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets; Access Principle: Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs; Integration principle: There should be collaboration between and within Governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services; Accountability principle: Programs and services should have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation (COAG 2009, p. C-1).

Potential weaknesses in this arrangement are that the principles and emphases within the NPARSD become a temporary ‘add-on’ to services and are not integrated into the longer term, and that government capacity to support the elements of monitoring, evaluation, baseline mapping and improved community engagement that require specialised skills are not sustainable in the longer term either. This would lead to, at best, the NPARSD becoming a superficial exercise. At worst, it would represent a new way to implement reform without achieving proper engagement and adequate understanding of Aboriginal people affected by it.

Through research undertaken within Desert Services that Work, Patrick Sullivan has assessed the National Partnership Agreements in the context of normalisation policy expressed by COAG in 1992, when it expressed the aspiration to ‘ensure that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders receive no less a provision of services than other Australian citizens’ (COAG 1992). In referring to the emphasis of policy as represented by the suite of COAG agreements announced in late 2008, Sullivan makes the point that: ‘The changes now being implemented by the National Partnership Agreements (NP), which fulfil the aims of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, have finally begun to implement the policy intention of 1991, and this overturns the consensus on Aboriginal control of remote service delivery which has endured since the early 1970s’ (Sullivan 2011, p. 3).

Sullivan also argues that there is a lack of economic analysis in the NPARSD, especially on the cost and benefits of the proposed work: ‘There may be benefits from increasing the concentration of government personnel in remote locations. Equally, there is a danger that this will simply increase the cost of the administrative overburden’ (2011, p. 15).

The performance of Australian Government agencies in the implementation of the NPARSD is monitored by the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services, a statutory officer established under the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services Act 2009. The first six-monthly report of Brian Gleeson, the Coordinator-General, was published in November 2009 and provides a formal assessment of progress since the implementation of the NPARSD began. Gleeson states that: ‘On the basis of these early visits and material provided by government departments in the course of preparing this report, I am convinced that the National Partnership on Remote Service Delivery agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments can and will work’ (Gleeson 2009, p. 1).

Although he reports that ‘clear progress is being made across the seven COAG building blocks’ (2009, p. 1), the Coordinator-General makes some points that are useful to our research:

However, progress is qualified:

- Based on available implementation data, the roll out of new COAG investments is broadly on track. But community expectations are high as a result of the Apology and the COAG commitments of November 2008 and people are impatient to see tangible improvements.
- In each jurisdiction, there are key obstacles to be overcome or opportunities that must be taken:
 - in South Australia, governance in the APY lands must be resolved by political leaders
 - in Western Australia, complex tenure issues must be addressed so that houses can be built
 - in the Northern Territory and New South Wales, Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments must work together to strengthen community governance
 - in Queensland, community-driven education reforms in Cape York must be allowed to progress.
- The level of servicing is variable across communities, for example, less than half have the services of a GP on most days and only two have a dentist on a fortnightly basis, eight have no permanent police presence and only 13 have a swimming pool.

- Good governance within communities, which includes Commonwealth, State and Territory and Local Government presence and coordination and strong community leadership, are preconditions for success – without these, the new investments are at risk.
- Mainstream agencies need to embrace the whole of government approach, including considering the out-posting of staff to Regional Operations Centres for periods of time to assist Government Business Managers and Regional Operations Centres to coordinate new investment in a way that supports governments' Closing the Gap targets.
- Governance and leadership training needs to be pooled and tailored to local circumstances given the proportion of communities struggling with governance issues.
- Local Government needs to be brought into the Remote Service Delivery partnership.
- Visible policing is vital to community perceptions of safety itself.
- There are too many examples of small to medium size infrastructure projects that have been delayed due to a combination of poor scoping and project management. I believe that consideration must be given to a whole of government contracting approach. This might help overcome these unacceptable delays and enable a pipeline of projects to be drawn up which will support local Indigenous training and employment.

If these risks are managed I believe that as many as a third of the 29 communities may be considered to be “thriving” within eighteen months, which would allow governments to gazette additional locations to receive the full benefits of this new approach to remote servicing. (2009, p. 2)

The notion of a thriving community is not defined in the report, but the upbeat assessment of the Coordinator-General is certainly eye-catching. His assessment of the importance of strong governance and community leadership reinforces the case for the investments made in this direction in the NPARSD. The point made by the report about outposting staff aligns with our view that specialised skills will be required for implementation, although the report argues for more staff rather than staff with particular kinds of skills and knowledge.

2.2 Services literature

In this section, we group our review of the literature on remote services in Australia under the following headings:

1. Governance
2. Accountability
3. Subsidiarity
4. Supply-side considerations
5. Cultural considerations
6. Engagement
7. Policy and administration

In the review that follows, the emphases are ours and are designed to highlight key points.

2.2.1 Governance

The much-referred-to Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development has produced well-documented empirical evidence supporting the argument that self-determination is crucial to successful economic development in remote Indigenous communities (Cornell & Kalt 2000). In the context of Native peoples in the United States, Cornell and Kalt claim that ‘indigenous self-determination is the only federal policy that has had any broad, positive, sustained impact on Native poverty’ (2000, p. ii). They caution, however, that a) self-governance policies must be properly **backed up with necessary resources and capable institutions** so that the move is more than simply ‘on paper’

(2000, pp. iii, 15–16); and b) self-determination must not be limited to representation on governing boards with predetermined operational systems, but rather **must include local Indigenous involvement in the design of the self-governance systems and institutions themselves**.

Martin's (2005) 'Strategic Engagement' approach leans on the Harvard Project findings and elaborates on some of their key themes in the Australian context, particularly focusing on the **meaning of the term 'cultural match'** (more on this in the 'Subsidiarity' section below). Martin (2002) also engages with Noel Pearson's (1999) argument for a form of self-determination that utilises 'moral authority' originating from within Aboriginal communities to give effect to state-sponsored economic development structures. Martin criticises this model for involving 'a degree of coercion', and points out that 'Aboriginal people may actively resist attempts to change certain of their core values and practices which are incompatible with the demands of the dominant society' (Martin 2002, p. 321). This emphasises the notion, also pointed out by Cornell and Kalt, that the very **goals of community development** themselves must also be self-determined and thus the 'success' of service delivery must also be self-defined.

Westbury and Sanders (2000, p. 8) also engage with the Harvard Project research to develop a 'regionally constructed dispersed governance' model drawn from a number of Australian case studies. The emphasis here is on finding ways of **serving a diversity of local interests** in each community, including those of 'young and old, men and women, land owners and non-land owners, drinkers and non-drinkers, people of different families or clans' as well as differences in levels of engagement with dominant Australian society. According to Westbury and Sanders, this diversity of needs is best served by a self-governance model that puts some level of focus on local councils and other organisations, but also strongly links local bodies to regionally constructed, function-specific service-delivery organisations.

Robinson et al. (2003) review the Clinical Care Trials (CCTs) conducted in the Northern Territory, which are included in the case studies examined by Westbury and Sanders (2000). The CCTs 'have set in place structural arrangements and processes which can deliver **substantial increases in Aboriginal participation in decision making about health** generally and within direct service delivery' (p. 17). One important feature of these programs is the establishment of Aboriginal Health Boards, which 'employ substantial numbers of community members in a range of activities aimed at prevention and health promotion' (p.17). Rowse (2005, p. 214) argues that 'the most important product of the policy-era known as "self-determination"' is the rise of what he calls **the 'Indigenous Sector'**, which falls somewhere between the often-made distinction between public and private entities: 'The Indigenous Sector is neither the "state" (though it is almost entirely publicly funded) nor "civil society" (though its organisations are mostly private concerns in their legal status)... [it] is a third thing created out of the interaction ... of government and the Indigenous domain' (2005, p. 214).

Rowse acknowledges the emergence of an '**Indigenous professional-managerial class**' who are 'cultivated' by successful Indigenous organisations and who will be able to 'staff' the Indigenous sector (2005, p. 225). The avenues for self-determination afforded to Aboriginal communities by the national government come with certain conditions, such as those necessary to apply for formal incorporation. The professional-managerial class is made up of people who are 1) dedicated more to an 'ethic of service' than any particular cultural tradition; 2) trained in skills necessary for engaging with dominant government organisations; and, therefore, 3) capable of successfully negotiating the interface between government and Indigenous domains.

Cornell and Kalt's notion of '**Cultural Match**' carries important implications for how governance structures could better adhere to the principle of Subsidiarity. Put simply, cultural match means that institutions of self-governance have to 'resonate with indigenous political culture' (Cornell & Kalt 2000, p. 16) in order to improve the likelihood of community trust and participation. Martin (2005) elaborates on the concept of 'cultural match' in the Australian context, recommending that '*as much*

social and political process as possible should be left within the realm of informal Indigenous social practices, not codified within formal corporate government structures and processes' (Martin cited in Rowse 2005, p. 221) and proposes a 'strategic engagement' approach.

Concern may be raised over the **possible tension with accountability principles** generated by the call for 'cultural match'. It seems on first glance that the 'informal Indigenous social practices' that Martin recommends could potentially provide a safe haven for corrupt or discriminatory practices within Indigenous communities. It is possible, however, that wording is more a problem than idea, here, as Cornell and Kalt offer two examples of successful 'cultural match' that clearly denote democratic process and access to justice systems as key to success (2000, p. 17). Likewise, Martin's notion of 'special regulatory assistance' in Corrs' Review of the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act, addresses accountability concerns by specifying a need for 'Regulatory intervention to protect members of the corporation from abuses' (Corrs et al. 2002, p. 9 cited in Rowse 2005, p. 221). It must be noted, then, that 'informal' should not be equated with 'unregulated' or 'lacking social order', as the term 'cultural match' clearly refers to ways of organising legitimate political practices, even if they are not codified in written documents.

Martin explains that, in the Australian context, 'cultural match' is often confused with what he calls 'cultural appropriateness', which could imply use of cultural values and traditions that are no longer appropriate in contemporary contexts in and of themselves. Such traditions may '[contradict]... requirements for effective and accountable organisations' (2005, p. 113), and thus may require challenging traditional values to some extent in order to better serve modern Indigenous populations. Martin proposes a 'strategic engagement' approach: '**Strategic engagement** is to be understood here as the processes through which Aboriginal individuals and collectivities interact with, contribute to, draw from, and of course potentially reject, values and practices of the dominant Australian society, in a considered and informed manner that provides them with real choices as to where to go and how to get there' (Martin 2005, p. 116).

This approach strives for 'cultural match' rather than 'cultural appropriateness' by recognising that overcoming marginalisation requires negotiating some level of engagement with the dominant society, while also maintaining culturally distinct worldviews and practices. Agreeing with the crucial role of self-determination, Martin stresses that Aboriginal people should have a 'substantial degree of control' over the ways in which they engage with dominant social structures, and points out that 'it must be recognised that many Aboriginal people will choose lifestyles which accord with their own values and priorities and which ... may be inimical to socio-economic equality with the general Australian population' (Martin 2005, p. 117).

2.2.2 Accountability

Mulgan takes accountability to mean 'a relationship in which one party, the holder of accountability, has the right to seek information about, to investigate and to scrutinise the actions of another party, the giver of accountability ... [and] also implies the right to impose remedies and sanctions' (2002, p. 3). He argues that when government agencies outsource services to private contractors, the line definitions of roles and responsibilities tend to become hazy, saying that networks resulting from **outsourcing agreements tend to lack clear lines of authority, and 'lend themselves to buck-passing when things go wrong'** (2002, p. 11). He also explains that 'once a service is outsourced, the amounts of money paid to individual members of the outsourcing contractor become commercially confidential and beyond the range of public inquiry' (2002, p. 11). This certainly cautions against the practice of outsourcing unless clear agreements denoting authority, responsibility and transparency are formalised. Mulgan concludes, however, with some level of ambiguity, that 'accountability is not an unqualified good and can sometimes come at too high a cost', and notes that higher efficiency in delivery of services may sometimes warrant outsourcing (2002, p. 13).

Cornell and Kalt (2000) provide a logical explanation for why self-determination raises accountability levels in service delivery: ‘When outsiders make bad decisions for an indigenous people ... the community bears most of the costs but has no power to respond with better decisions... Once decisions move into the hands of those whose fortunes are at stake, the decision-makers themselves begin to bear the consequences of their decisions’ (2000, p. 14). The body of research stemming from the Harvard Project has referred to cases from around the world supporting this conclusion.

Cornell and Kalt specify that ‘**effective, non-politicised dispute-resolution mechanisms**’ (2000, p. 15) raise the likelihood that self-governing institutions will produce sustainable community development, as such mechanisms tend to reduce corruption and opportunism by politicians and also tend to result in more efficient decision-making procedures, often leading to more capable policies and bureaucracies. Westbury and Saunders (2000) reiterate Cornell’s research on the importance of dispute-resolution mechanisms, but do not really offer any new evidence to support it. They do, however, draw from Australian case studies to point out the importance of 1) promoting **collaborative, non-adversarial relationships between various government agencies**; and 2) **focusing more on processes than structures** when it comes to institutional coordination of service delivery.

These findings seem to support the Harvard Project findings that both de-politicisation and process effectiveness are crucial to improving service delivery in Aboriginal communities. Rowse’s (2005) work also seems to indicate that **process-orientation** is a key element in establishment of successful self-governing institutions. Rowse (2005) points out that the Indigenous Sector’s position somewhere between the public and private domains **complicates issues of accountability**. Using the example of royalties distributed under the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act*, he points out that: ‘In one view, statutory royalties were “public” money, and Aboriginal recipients were publicly accountable in their use of it. In the opposed view, Aboriginal people received the money in virtue of their ownership of the land, and were no more accountable in their use of that income than anyone else deriving income from their property’ (p. 213). This emphasises the need for clear lines to be determined regarding the circumstances under which remote desert communities are charged with accountability of income earned through land rights acts.

Rowse (2005, p. 219) also engages with Fingleton’s (1996) notion of ‘**internal**’ and ‘**external**’ **accountability**. Internal accountability, in this context, refers to an organisation’s responsibility to stay true to Aboriginal culture by providing culturally appropriate service delivery and representing Aboriginal interests and values. External accountability, on the other hand, refers to the organisation’s responsibility to report to relevant government agencies and other funding bodies, primarily regarding finances and outcomes.

Fingleton argues that organisations should be allowed to pursue internal accountability, which calls for more structural and procedural leeway than federal incorporation policies allowed at the time. Martin (2005, p. 121) specifies Fingleton’s (1996) notion of internal accountability, claiming that it consists of two dimensions: ‘accountability of organisations to their memberships and that to their constituents or clients’. Importantly, he points out Fingleton’s finding that **organisations with high levels of internal accountability were more likely to demonstrate high levels of external accountability** as well. Martin frames accountability as ‘an essentially intercultural construct’, goes on to discuss the problems that ‘localism’ can pose to successful self-governance, and posits that ‘incorporating mechanisms to enhance the internal accountability of Aboriginal organisations may allow localism to be more productively dealt with’ (2005, p. 122).

Rowse (2005) agrees that self-determination is important to successful service delivery, but raises the question of what should happen when local people do not possess the skills necessary to develop and maintain institutions that are sustainable in the contemporary political and economic environment. He subsequently refers to Martin’s (2003) recommendation that ‘**skilled outsiders**’ **should be recruited not only for their knowledge, but also to provide ‘disinterested’ management that seeks out a wide**

diversity of community perspectives and refrains from engaging in local political conflicts, and seems to imply that the developing ‘professional-managerial class’ of Aboriginal workers are well-equipped to serve in these roles (Rowse 2005, pp. 224–25).

Westbury and Sanders (2000, p. 13) use the Katherine West Health Board (KWHB) example as a model of how regional boards can be established to **enable local Aboriginal participation in high-level decision-making roles**, and recommend ‘investing heavily in educating Board members ... including utilising innovative reporting systems designed for people with low literacy levels’. They also point out that **‘extensive consultation with non-Aboriginal residents’ was also important** to successful service coordination in the KWHB case. Robinson et al. (2003, p. 17) also sum up their review of KWHB and the other CCTs by claiming that establishment of the Boards, coupled with comprehensive application of new technologies for ‘clinically relevant strategic information’ gathering, **increases the potential for stronger measures of accountability**.

Martin (2005) **advocates the need for both insiders and outsiders** in decision-making roles, while also pointing out **the challenge that localism can pose**. He understands localism as a strong focus on connections based on small-scale (local and sub-local) groupings which are often determined by kinship. According to Martin, this ‘can lead to a form of ethnocentrism in which engagement with the wider society... is devalued and even scorned’ (2005, p. 111). This phenomenon can obviously make it **difficult for any outsider to become ‘trusted’** in remote communities, yet Martin claims that localism makes **outsider involvement imperative to effective service-delivery**, as it ‘is necessary precisely because they can ensure that there is a diversity of perspectives and values brought to bear on an organisation’s operations’ (2005, p. 120). This claim is backed up by international studies conducted on World Bank ‘Community Driven Development’ projects, which found that, while ultimate authority and accountability should rest with local residents, participation by outsiders can quell local corruption (Gillespie 2003).

Cornell and Kalt’s abovementioned claim on the need for **effective dispute-resolution mechanisms** is also relevant here. Along with reducing corruption and creating more efficient decision-making processes, they mention that dispute-resolution mechanisms create ‘buffers between day-to-day business management and politics’ (2000, p. 15), which seems to favour more successful interpersonal relationships across service networks. It also seems that good dispute-resolution mechanisms would be a key factor in developing system-dependent (rather than person-dependent) institutions.

Cornell and Kalt (2000, p. 13) point out the relatively obvious conclusion that self-determination promotes citizen engagement and develops development agendas that are more astutely focused on local needs. They offer evidence that increased decision-making power tends to spur local motivation to build, improve and participate in service organisations. Moreover, the Aboriginal agendas typically resulting from increased self-rule, according to this research team, tend to focus more heavily on community and economic development than outside agendas, which are often politically motivated. The dialogue between Cornell and Kalt (2000) and Martin (2005) over ‘cultural match’ is also highly relevant to this principle (see below under ‘Subsidiarity’).

2.2.3 Subsidiarity: regionalisation v. localisation

While there seems to be a general consensus that Aboriginal self-determination is crucial for effective service delivery, a hearty debate emerges in the literature concerning the level at which self-determination should be enacted. While some authors argue that localised governance structures should play a primary role in decision making, others argue that remote Aboriginal communities are better served through regionalised service networks.

Rowse **stresses the importance of allowing local service delivery agencies to maintain their autonomy** (1992, as cited in Westbury & Sanders 2000). This autonomy includes, of course, the freedom to negotiate cooperative arrangements with other communities, but Rowse (2005) implies that the primary locus of decision making should reside ultimately with local units of self-governance, presumably in the capable hands of the ‘professional-managerial class’ emerging in Aboriginal communities. He reiterates claims by Dodson and Smith (2003), Cornell and Kalt (2000) and Martin (2003) that local agencies will be most effective when political interference by governing boards is kept as distant as possible from day-to-day operations. Drawing from the 2002 Corrs review, he recommends that ‘the rules that define the responsibilities of directors [should] apply also to the “officers” whose service (under the directors) includes substantial participation in the making and implementing of decisions’ (2005, pp. 225–26). This seems to advocate the allocation of more power and responsibility in the hands of managers and practitioners ‘on the ground’ in agencies serving remote communities.

Martin agrees that ‘hierarchical state-instituted policies and program delivery...have manifestly failed’ (2003, p. 108), but expresses **grave concerns over the effects that ‘localism’** (or ‘factionalism’) can have on service delivery. He defines this as a situation in which ‘political, social, and economic imperatives lie within various forms of local group rather than some broader aggregate or “community”’, and comments that ‘in such circumstances, the delivery of equitable and accountable services may be rendered problematic’ (2003, p. 122). He notes that the involvement of skilled ‘outsiders’ may help improve internal accountability, a finding that is supported by Gillespie (2003) in his international study of World Bank funded community-driven development projects.

Sanders, in both his work with Westbury (2000) and with Holcombe (2006), is less concerned with localism and advocates an approach that affords local communities a good degree of autonomy while linking communities in the region to form function-specific service delivery networks. Building on Rowse’s (1992) terminology, Westbury and Sanders develop a **‘regionally constructed dispersed governance’** model, which **‘[encourages] local councils/organisations to be complemented by, and linked to, larger specific-purpose regional service agencies’** (2000, p. 8). Two examples of good practice are offered to illustrate this approach, namely the housing in the Northern Territory (IHANT) project, and the Katherine West Health Board (KWHB). Several lessons drawn from these examples carry direct implications for the Desert Knowledge effective service delivery principles, as will be discussed in more detail below.

In a paper first presented at the 2006 Desert Knowledge Symposium, Sanders and Holcombe (2006) **criticise the Northern Territory’s push for regionalisation** that eliminates remote local governance schemes in favour of fewer and fewer regional, multi-settlement governments. They argue, instead, for a ‘combination of single-settlement localism and multi-settlement regionalism ... which **respects and builds on localism rather than discounts and disparages it**’ (2006, p. 3). They offer the case of Laramba and Engawala settlements as a success story, in comparison to settlements closer to Ti Tree, which are ‘slowly being reduced to not much more than outlying, very basic dormitories’ (p. 4) due to the concentration of services in Ti Tree as the regional centre of the Anmatjere Community Government Council (ACGC). Laramba and Engawala, argue Sanders and Holcombe, have escaped this fate due to their relative remoteness, but yet continue to develop ties to the regional network. One important feature of this relationship, they note, is the appointment of a Community Manager in each settlement who has ‘important links to the local community organisation and committee, as well as to ACGC’ (2007, p. 7).

Sullivan’s **‘whole of government approach’** (2005, p. 3) seems somewhat congruent with the ‘regionally constructed dispersed governance’ model. He **criticises the Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA)** strategy on the grounds that the **administrative frameworks for regional networks are still underdeveloped and therefore inadequate**, noting that ‘these networks will require legitimacy, experience and skills beyond that demanded of the ATSIC Regional Councils that they replace’ as they ‘will need to set regional planning priorities for the integrated delivery of services from

a range of government departments... and be able themselves to deliver cooperation and agreement from their constituent communities' (2005, p. 12). Drawing lessons from the Combined Kimberly Aboriginal Organisations (CKAO), which 'foundered' due to lack of trust between participating local councils, Sullivan concludes that 'an approach to "nesting" sub-regional and regional organisations one within another ... could have been more productive' (2005, p. 14). His work also agrees with Westbury and Sanders (2000) in that it indicates the benefits of concentrating regional resources into function-specific organisations.

Sullivan's approach focuses more heavily on the development of regional representative networks for service delivery than the Sanders approach, which puts the emphasis on preserving local autonomy. Sullivan's approach also places some emphasis on the need for coordination between organisations offering different types of services, which is not directly addressed in the Westbury and Sanders (2000) nor the Sanders and Holcombe (2006) research. Moran (2008) does not expressly advocate localisation over regionalisation, but does address some developments in technology and governance systems that may enable localisation. His concern with streamlining administrative requirements seems to imply that localisation is favourable when possible, as this would presumably allow greater Aboriginal engagement in service delivery by reducing these administrative obstacles.

The Harvard Project provides a **model for determining the 'appropriate units'** of Native self-governance that is based on the questions of effectiveness and legitimacy (Cornell & Kalt 2000, pp. 23–25). The **effectiveness** question asks what level of organisation is required for the most effective implementation of Native decision-making processes, while the **legitimacy** question asks which unit of governance is most likely to 'command the loyalties' of the people being governed. They admit that 'realism compels recognition that the answers to these two questions may not always be the same' and conclude that such cases 'require innovative institution-building and sensitive negotiation, as well as recognition that not all government functions need to be organised at a single level or through a single entity' (2000, p. 24).

The final part of the above quote indicates that the 'regionally constructed dispersed self-governance' model (Westbury & Sanders 2000) may be helpful in situations where effective service delivery requires construction of regional agencies that are not seen as legitimate unit of governance by the people they serve. Unlike Westbury and Sanders, however, Cornell and Kalt point out that some services might function most effectively and legitimately when the primary locus of control rests with local communities. They point out that Native Alaskans have shown great success with locally controlled schools, and also indicate that local control of policing may also be beneficial (2000, p. 25). They caution strongly against a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to service delivery, and recognise that effective service delivery in remote communities may require the sharing of programs and resources even where communities do not share governing institutions. Ultimately, the project concludes that 'optimal governance solutions for Alaska Native communities will vary' and that 'consolidation, if it occurs at all, must emerge from Native choices' (2000, p. 24).

Cornell and Kalt (2000) **caution against restricting the allocation of funds to regional organisations**. They remark that 'by mandating that only regional entities can control funds or make primary decisions about how problems will be addressed, [such policies] reduce citizen engagement in problem solving, narrow the range of potentially effective solutions that can be explored, and make improving Native welfare more difficult' (2000, p. iv). Rowse (2005) builds on the Harvard Project's finding that 'leaders and boards should make the overarching policies, enforce the rules, and provide strategic direction. But leaders and governing boards should not be routinely interfering with the daily implementation of those policies' (Dodson & Smith 2003 as cited in Rowse 2005, p. 224). This, in his view, frees up the personnel on the ground in remote communities to better match service delivery to the needs of their Aboriginal clients.

Westbury and Sanders (2000) emphasise the **importance of strong, collaborative relationships between local and regional levels of organisation**. They advocate locally operated service delivery, nested within regional, function-specific agencies governed by boards comprised of elected representatives from individual communities. They specify that the different tiers of organisation should develop a ‘multi-pronged’ strategy to keep in constant communication with all stakeholders (including land councils, community councils, and other organisations), and forge formal Regional Service Delivery Agreements where necessary to clarify each stakeholder’s roles and responsibilities. They also note the importance of putting into place strong dispute-resolution mechanisms and focusing on the ‘creation of enhanced processes for the institutional coordination of service delivery’ (2000, p. 15).

Sullivan also places emphasis on the need for **improved communication and coordination of agencies serving different functions and jurisdictions**. He remarks that ‘anthropological analysis informed by Critical Management Studies (Alvesson & Willmott 1992) and complexity theory, would assess the flows of information and the contrasting interpretations and reformulations among staff of various levels’ (Sullivan 2005, p. 16).

Martin’s (2005) adversity to **localism** includes concern that it **forms an obstacle to internal accountability**. He cautions that ‘organisational structures and processes [must] take account of and incorporate the realities of localism, while still enabling effective and accountable services to the broader Aboriginal constituency’ (2005, p. 122). His ‘strategic engagement’ approach seeks to maximise accountability by drawing operational principles from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains.

Sullivan notes the problems posed for accountability by ‘**bickering between the States and the Commonwealth over responsibility**’, resulting in a situation where ‘states can neglect the services they guarantee to all other citizens, confident in the knowledge that the Commonwealth will wear the blame’ (2005, p. 4). His whole-of-government approach seeks to address this problem by coordinating efforts by agencies from different sectors and jurisdictions.

Sullivan also stipulates that accountability is **particularly challenging in the context of his whole-of-government approach**: ‘the organisational flexibility required to deal with emergent consequences of action needs to be contrasted with the equal need to maintain disciplined systems of reporting and accountability... cooperation across sectoral lines inevitably blurs the traditional boundaries of budget allocation, dispersal, accounting, authority and responsibility’ (2005, p. 17). He cautions that the organisational cultures people tend to fall back on in such complex circumstances may not be well-suited for this environment, and advocates further research targeting concrete proposals for how to develop an appropriate organisational framework to meet the challenge of accountability in whole-of-government approaches to Aboriginal affairs.

Sullivan also advocates **increased involvement by non-government organisations (NGOs)**, ‘for negotiation, monitoring, implementation and reporting’ (2005, p. 10). He notes that the importance of NGO involvement is well acknowledged in mainstream government; however, they have been largely seen as ‘part of the problem’ in the domain of Indigenous affairs. Westbury and Sanders’ (2000, p. 15) advocacy of **Regional Service Delivery Agreements** is also relevant here, as these seek to provide formal documentation of where responsibility lies when service delivery is coordinated by a number of stakeholders.

2.2.4 Supply-side considerations

Sullivan (2005, p. 3) notes that ‘**piece-meal consultation and service delivery by disparate agencies and jurisdictions**’ can result in the **inadequacy of supply**. He attributes the inability of government organisations to coordinate services to the fact that, often times, complete, high-quality delivery depends on agreement and commitment by several separate government bodies. The example he raises is housing provision, which may be either pursued without the provision of electricity or

sealed roads, or might not be provided at all due to lack of agreement between relevant authorities. His ‘whole-of-government policy’ proposes to address such problems by ‘streamlining policy development, implementation, and monitoring’ and ‘encouraging coordination of activities across commonwealth, state, and non-governmental sectoral boundaries’ (2005, p. 3).

Sullivan also notes the difficulty that agencies face when they try to **divide their time between service delivery and advocacy**, which may reduce the quality of services provided. He recommends that regional agencies should be constructed specifically for the purpose of advocacy in order to free up other organisations to concentrate their efforts on the ‘pragmatics of Aboriginal development’ (2005, p. 11).

One favourable aspect of **regionalisation** addressed by both Westbury and Sanders (2000) and Cornell and Kalt (2000) is that it **allows resources to be pooled together** to provide more and better services. The KWHB, for example, pooled together Medicare Benefits Scheme funds for all residents in the region to provide better medical services to more people in remote areas. This enabled residents of remote communities (who were generally under-utilising the scheme) to access services provided by those funds through implementation of the program (Westbury & Sanders 2000, p. 12). While Cornell and Kalt (2000) do note the benefits that resource pooling can add to quality of service, they also caution against restricting the allocation of funds to regional organisations. (See ‘Subsidiarity’ above).

Sullivan’s (2005, p. 3) **concern with the ‘bickering’ between agencies** at different jurisdictional levels also seems relevant here, as clearly this is partly a result of unclear decision points. One may infer, then, that his whole-of-government approach would have to carefully map out decision points in order to avoid repetition of these problems (see ‘Accountability’ above for more discussion of this).

Westbury and Sanders (2000, p. 15) propose formal **Regional Service Delivery Agreements** as a way of mapping out who should decide what, when.

Martin (2003) proposes the involvement of **skilled ‘outsiders’ as a way of combating the problems with internal accountability posed by localism**. Citing case studies by Finlayson (2004), he claims that ‘supporting diversity is not just good general management practice; it is essential to strategic engagement’ (2003, p. 120). This is also supported by case studies in other countries conducted by World Bank (Gillespie 2003).

Sullivan stipulates that **‘active relationship-building by skilled professionals over a substantial period will be needed** if regional networks are to have the legitimacy to negotiate, and the ability to facilitate, Regional Partnership Agreements’ (2005, p. 14). He explains that ‘suspicion, jealousy, or simple non-alignment exists in Aboriginal regions as much as it does between government departments’ and that ‘substantial intra-Aboriginal negotiation and mediation’ are necessary before sustainable regional networks can be developed.

Westbury and Sanders (2000, p. 7) **‘advocate the development of regional function-specific service agencies’**. Function-specific services may be more capable of developing successful methods of communication, negotiation and cooperation with the service users that are specifically designed in accordance with that organisation’s specialised function.

2.2.5 Cultural considerations

Moran (2008) focuses on some of the issues that make service delivery in remote Aboriginal communities especially challenging. He refers to a **‘demand-responsiveness’ approach** based on general principles of liberal market-economics, frames ‘service users’ as ‘consumers’, and claims that service providers ‘have a greater level of success if services are tailored to local consumer realities’ (2008, p. 188). He stipulates, however, that ‘the relationship between demand and supply in Indigenous settlements differs from economic markets in a number of significant ways’ (2008, p. 189). Several of these relate to **the nature of life in remote desert communities**: 1) a lack of income flow to these

communities makes many consumers unable to purchase services; and 2) there is little competition between providers, resulting in a lack of incentive to improve services. Another, closely related, factor that must be considered is **mobility of consumers**; this results in what Moran calls ‘service catchment’ areas around regional centres with ‘service populations’ instead of ‘resident populations’ (2008, p. 190).

Moran also notes that there is evidence that some consumers are willing to travel long distances to access services that are provided in a more appropriate manner than those offered in nearer locations. He concludes that demand responsiveness ‘provides an analytical basis to bring ... two types of knowledge together’, namely ‘local knowledge held by consumers and leaders, and administrative knowledge held by service providers’ (2008, p. 196).

Sullivan (2005) criticises the capability of simplistic programs (such as Shared Responsibility Agreements or SRAs) on the grounds that **mobility of persons between communities makes matters more complex**. For example, he notes that compliance with a program may be based on agreements with permanent residents of the community, but that realistically significant numbers of people only live in certain remote communities on a part-time basis. These part-time residents may be expected to comply with a program even though they have not agreed to it. Moreover, any health program must take mobility into account as regular migrations can be relevant to the spread of communicable diseases, and the ability to provide consistent medical services to migrants. Sullivan argues that the planning of SRAs and other remote desert community programs should take into account ‘the changing composition of residents’ (2005, p. 9).

Sanders and Holcombe (2006) report that there are some 400 remote settlements in the Australian desert with average populations of just 100 residents, and note that many of these residents frequently migrate between remote settlements and urban or regional centres. Their research takes particular aim at **addressing the governance challenges posed by remoteness and mobility**, and concludes that the establishment of regional service delivery centres without preservation of some role for ‘single settlement localism’ will lead to the downfall of these small communities. Cornell and Kalt address the issue of remoteness and the small size of many Alaskan Native communities, and conclude that: ‘[this] means that **effective self-governance, in some cases may require sharing self-governing institutions across communities**’ (2000, p. iii).

Robinson et al. (2003) point out another relevant issue regarding remoteness, namely the **lack of employment opportunities** for local service users. The NT Clinical Care Trials (CCT) they studied invested significant resources in the education and training of local people to enable them to take on paid employment in the service delivery sector.

Moran’s (2008) work is **heavily focused on the benefits of subsidiarity**, and encourages service providers to examine the ‘demand’ side of services more closely. In order to improve service access and outcomes, he argues, service providers will need to respond to local capacities, local needs, and the goals and values of local residents. Importantly, these may be based on communitarian concerns, and may not respond to services that aim at serving individualised consumers.

Cornell and Kalt’s (2000) findings suggest that program sharing may be more suitable to the service delivery needs of very small remote communities, but cautions against a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to determining this. Extensive consultation within and between settlements would be necessary to determine **whether program sharing will best serve local capacity**. Robinson et al.’s (2003) evaluation of the NT CCTs implied that meeting local capacity and improving citizen engagement in services should include (where possible) the **provision of education, training, and employment opportunities in remote areas**.

Moran (2008) mentions that **technology** is making the localisation of services in remote areas more and more of a reality, particularly because they increase the capacity of local communities to ‘overcome the problems of remoteness, and to transcend cultural boundaries’ (2008, p. 195). This has direct

implications for the principle of connectivity, as technology **allows for better flows of information on two fronts**: across vast distances and as an interface between cultural domains. Sanders and Holcombe's (2006) research argues that 'single settlement localism' is important to preserve in order to address the special context of remoteness and mobile populations. One mechanism they recommend for accomplishing this is **employment of a local 'Community Manager'** who keeps an office in the remote settlement, and has close ties with both regional and local governing bodies (2006, p. 7). This preserves the autonomy of local communities, while increasing connectivity between local communities and regional agencies.

Sullivan's (2005) argument about the complexities posed by mobility of persons complicates the principle of accountability in that it must be asked how part-time residents of a community can be accounted for. Guaranteeing some level of power and participation in services for these persons, as well as consistent access to services, may be a difficult task for service providers. Furthermore, we must ask the interrelated questions of 1) should local service providers be accountable for all part-time residents, and 2) who should be accountable for people who split their time between different settlements? In addition, regular migration presumably complicates matters when trying to measure these citizens' engagement in service provision (including access to and satisfaction with services).

Moran's (2008) use of a demand-responsive approach is ultimately concerned with the accountability of service providers to their 'consumers'. Without addressing accountability directly in any depth, his approach revolves around the notion that focusing more heavily on accountability to consumers' needs, values, and circumstances will improve service providers' capacity to improve service outcomes.

All of the research above indicates that the mobility of persons is something that requires serious consideration in terms of local conditions affecting demand. Services in many remote desert communities **must be able to adapt to constantly changing populations**.

2.2.6 Engagement between service providers and users

Moran supports the idea that the form of engagement will vary depending on service, particularly considering the special circumstances of remote communities: '**For some functions, consumers demand full powers** through locally controlled organisations, with the requisite devolution of authority and resources. **For other functions, consumers have little interest in decision making**, and just demand reliable availability and use' (2008, p. 195). According to his demand-responsive approach, responding to that demand for variation in engagement is presumably part of the task of service delivery organisations.

Westbury and Sanders (2000, p. 15) argue for the **formalisation of agreements between different stakeholders involved in service delivery at a regional level** to clarify roles and responsibilities. They advocate the use of Regional Service Delivery Agreements (RSDAs) to clarify the processes of regional governance. They also emphasise, however, that services should be 'operated at the local level under the umbrella' of regional, function-specific agencies, the latter of which should be formalised by RSDAs.

Martin (2003) stresses the importance of providing transparent and accountable services, but expresses **concern about formalising relationships in corporate codes** – '*as much social and political process as possible* should be left within the realm of informal Indigenous practices, not codified within formal corporate government structures and processes'. He emphasises, instead, the role of 'strong and effective leadership and management' and ensuring that organisations are 'clearly and unambiguously Aboriginal-controlled and focused' (2003, p. 121).

Rowse (2005) largely concurs with Martin's notion that Aboriginal organisations should be allowed **some degree of informality** at the local level. In arguing for more responsibility to be placed in the hands of the 'professional-managerial class' that are involved in direct service delivery in remote communities, he stipulates that their own **decision-making power and responsibilities should be clearly defined**. He notes support for this notion by the Corrs review (Corrs et al. 2002). He also notes

that it is important that standards of performance are not lowered in order to incorporate local managers who have fallen victim to lower standards in education and job training. Rowse's professional-managerial class is to be held to the highest standards of diligence (2005, p. 226).

Writing about privatisation generally, and not specifically applying his critique to Indigenous affairs or remote communities, Mulgan (2002) provides a critique of the neo-liberal tendency toward privatisation of service delivery by demonstrating how **government outsourcing to private contractors can blur the lines in terms of who is responsible for what**. This, he shows, can cause serious accountability problems in service delivery.

Sullivan's (2005) use of a whole-of-government approach arises largely from a concern that **lack of clarity of roles and relationships hamper effectiveness** in service delivery. He claims that poor coordination between agencies from different sectors and jurisdictions often results in 'duplication of responsibility and argumentation about where responsibility lies' (2005, p. 3). He also takes particular note of the problems that arise when community consultation is conducted multiple times by different agencies, and remarks that: 'This duplication of consultation is itself felt as oppressive' (2005, p. 3). He concludes that the Regional Partnership Agreement strategy must develop an administrative framework that clearly delineates roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.

Rowse (2005) argues that service providers will accomplish a better match to local needs and capacity if the **decision-making powers of local managers and professionals are clearly denoted**. Martin (2005) seems to support Rowse's findings with his own **emphasis on strong leadership by local managers**. It is important to note here, though, that Martin also strongly advocates for the involvement of 'outsiders' in local service delivery to quell the problems of 'localism' and ensure representation of a diverse array of needs and interests.

Sullivan's (2005) concern with **duplication of community consultation** by multiple agencies certainly indicates problems that poor information flows cause for service provision. Better coordination and information sharing between agencies is recommended. Mulgan's (2002) critique of outsourcing is also relevant here, as he notes that the resulting '**networks of public agencies and private contractors** are only loosely bound, and often are **characterised by poor communication flows**. Westbury and Sanders (2000) also place due emphasis on the importance of **information flows between regional and local levels of service organisation**, claiming that RSDAs can aid in this process by formalising each stakeholder's role in reporting procedures.

Westbury and Sanders' (2000) **advocacy of RSDAs** (detailed above) seems to be largely concerned with ensuring the accountability of various stakeholders collaborating at the regional level. Rowse (2005) stipulates that the emerging managerial-professional class should be granted decision-making powers, but also that its accountability should be made clear.

Martin's abovementioned **caution against formalisation of service delivery relationships** allows 'informal Indigenous practices' to do the work of determining the specifics of service delivery (Martin 2003). This approach, it would seem, may allow a certain amount of flexibility as to how services are delivered, allowing providers to adapt to changing conditions in the community. Note that Martin's proposal may conflict with Westbury and Sanders' (2000) recommendations to formalise relationships through RPAs, although it seems that Westbury and Saunders are only advocating RPAs on a regional (macro) level, while Martin's proposal seems to apply only to the local (micro) environment.

Many of the authors noted above indicate the importance of high quality interpersonal relationships in improving service delivery outcomes. Moran notes that this principle is **especially relevant in the Aboriginal context** since 'local knowledge is uncoded [and] primarily manifested through speech, and mediated by interpersonal relationships' (2008, p. 196). He goes on to stress that in order to be

better informed by demand, quality face-to-face interaction between service providers and consumers is absolutely necessary in order for the requisite interface between local and administrative knowledge to transpire.

As noted above, Sullivan remarks that **‘active relationship-building by skilled professionals over a substantial period will be needed** if regional networks are to have the legitimacy to negotiate, and the ability to facilitate, Regional Partnership Agreements’ (2005, p. 14). He explains that ‘suspicion, jealousy, or simple non-alignment exists in Aboriginal regions as much as it does between government departments’ and that ‘substantial intra-Aboriginal negotiation and mediation’ is necessary before sustainable regional networks can be developed (2005, p. 14).

Martin stipulates that case studies of best practice show that successful organisations ‘pay **careful attention to their stakeholders, customers, and clients**’ (2005, p. 120), indicating the importance of relationships on a number of different axes. Rowse (2005) concludes his piece by quoting the research of Elaine Wilson Martin, which stretches beyond the Aboriginal realm to general principles of good practice in human service organisations generally: ‘Within the organisational structure of human services, **staff-consumers relations are of central importance**’ (Martin EW 1997, p. 5 as cited in Rowse 2005, p. 227). Westbury and Sanders (2000) advocate the development of function-specific agencies at the regional level (heavily linked to autonomous local agencies) partly for the reason that regional organisations ‘have a scale and ability to develop professional and **systems expertise** which can never be the case in small multi-purpose agencies’ (2000, p. 7). Westbury and Sanders’s regionally constructed dispersed governance model prefers the ‘nesting’ of smaller local organisations within larger regional ones over the enlargement of local councils to serve bigger areas. This seems primarily to be because they believe that higher quality relationships can emerge in such a framework, particularly with regard to the sharing of expertise.

Moran’s (2008) demand responsiveness requires a steady flow of information between service providers and service consumers. It is **only through high quality relationships that such a flow of information will be possible**, particularly in the Aboriginal context where social practices are generally ‘uncodified’ and oral transmission of information may be more culturally appropriate. Moran also notes that technology provides better ways of maintaining information flows to remote desert communities, and may also enable relationship building, as it overcomes barriers posed by transportation limits and ‘transcends cultural barriers’ (2008, p. 195).

Paying attention to interpersonal relationships on a number of axes (stakeholders, customers, and clients) as Martin suggests above, seems conducive and perhaps necessary to achieving higher levels of accountability.

2.2.7 Policy and administration of services

Rowse (2005) argues that **administrative control over local practitioners should be kept to a minimum**. Moran (2008) claims that **excessive administrative work acts as an obstacle to self-determination in remote communities**. His demand-responsive approach ‘provides an analytical basis to bring ... two types of knowledge together’, namely ‘local knowledge held by consumers and leaders, and administrative knowledge held by service providers’ (2008, p. 196). He notes ‘block or pooled funding’, ‘innovative decentralisation reforms’, the streamlining of governance systems, and a relatively long list of more specific measures that may be useful in accomplishing reduction of administrative obstacles (2008, pp. 195–96).

Sullivan’s use of a whole-of-government approach focuses on ‘streamlining policy development, implementation, and monitoring so that unnecessary intermediaries are removed, responses are faster, and all levels of government and community governance are aligned in their aims’ (2005, p. 3).

Westbury and Sanders (2000) note the **problems that can emerge from overly complicated funding arrangements** for localised service delivery in remote communities. A lack of coordination between local service organisations, they note, makes funding sources ‘difficult to trace thus accentuating the fragmentation of service delivery, significantly hindering coordinated community development and financial accountability’ (2000, p. 9). They support their argument for function-specific organisations with reference to examples of successful programs that are ‘specific and specialist in focus and not required to assume a number of unrelated functions’ (2000, p. 7), indicating that the complex administrative formats accompanying multi-service agencies may be undesirable.

Another administrative obstacle that is, importantly, noted by a number of authors is that posed by **adversarial relationships between different political bodies**. As noted above, Sullivan explains that ‘bickering between the States and the Commonwealth over responsibility and resources’ can result in a situation where ‘states can neglect the services they guarantee to all other citizens’ (2005, p. 4). Rowse (2005) and Cornell and Kalt (2000) caution against the detrimental effects adversarial political relationships can have. The authors include mention of adversary between different jurisdictional levels, as well as the detrimental effect that local ‘politicking’ can have when it is allowed to interfere with day-to-day operations of service organisations.

Moran remarks that **decreasing administrative workload ‘would narrow the capacity gap**, and should act as a catalyst to increase participation and improved administrative practice’ (2008, p. 194). Framing administrative work as an obstacle to local capacity to lead delivery of services to their community, he argues that this is an important aspect of demand that needs to be taken into consideration in order to improve Aboriginal participation in service delivery.

Sullivan’s (2005) concern with the removal of ‘intermediaries’ in administrative processes would presumably aim to increase connectivity between key stakeholders. He specifically mentions the problems that both the ‘**bickering**’ and the excessively **complicated administrative arrangements** noted above can have on accountability. His whole-of-government approach aims to ‘eliminate ... argumentation about where responsibility clearly lies’ (2005, p. 3). His concern with ‘**faster responses**’ is relevant here, as his recommended ‘streamlining’ would presumably be able to adapt more readily to changing circumstances and conditions in remote communities (2005, p. 3).

Westbury and Sanders (2000) claim that complexity of funding arrangements can lead to fragmentation of services. Moran remarks that: ‘Policies and programs are forever expanding and undergoing reform, based largely on new supply-driven solutions that are seldom informed by consumer perspectives or even internal evaluations against policy goals’ (2008, p. 187). While he does not directly address the ramifications of policy change to service delivery providers, his concern with excessive administrative work would imply a concern that policy changes would serve to further complicate administrative obstacles. Martin also indicates the **failure of these policy changes to address the real problem** which, in his view, is better consideration of the ‘demand’ or ‘consumer’ side of service delivery. This implies that unnecessary and poorly researched policy changes should be minimised.

Rowse’s (2005) argument for the need to reduce administrative control over local managers and the day-to-day practice of service delivery is perhaps also relevant here. It seems that the **more flexibility afforded to grassroots managers and practitioners, the more resilient well-run organisations will be** in the face of policy changes (so long as those policies do not enact greater levels of restrictions on local management).

2.3 Demand-responsive services

Previous research conducted by DKCRC provides a valuable guide to the literature on demand-responsive services. Owen Stanley (2008) provides an economist’s perspective on demand-responsive services, making the point that ‘settlements, like all communities, can gain significant benefits from

a service delivery system that is more responsive to consumer demands. These benefits include changing the nature and volume of services so that they better reflect the desires of local people and the conditions they face' (2008, p. 8). He goes on to contrast a centrally managed administrative system for making decisions on services with a market system, or a demand-responsive system, which places the consumers in a position to signal the scope and nature of services they desire.

Stanley sets out the challenges faced in establishing demand-responsive systems for services. These are consumers' demand, budgets, institutional capacity, knowledge, externalities, ability of government to respond, and equity. A key comment he makes is that 'with the exception of the house rental market and possibly electricity, there are no markets in settlements for the services being discussed here. This means that settlements do not have a simple method by which the consumers' or settlement's demand for services can be expressed to the suppliers. In a market context, demands for services are measured by what people are prepared to pay for a service' (2008, p. 8).

The overall assessment made by Stanley is that 'the importance of the challenges depends on the nature of the demand-responsive system being developed. For example, if the goal is simply to have a system which is completely run by government but in which the nature of services provided broadly corresponds with what people in settlements want, then most of the challenges (as listed in the previous paragraph) will not be relevant. On the other hand, if the aim is to have a system that simulates a full market system, then all of them will be important' (2008, p. 8).

In developing an analytical framework on demand-responsive services, Moran notes that: 'Demand responsiveness is an established principle in the operation of economic markets. Market-based systems are considered to be better than supply-driven systems, because the allocation process is demand driven by consumers' (2006, p. 4). He points out that international development practice, for example as expressed through the World Bank, has long recognised the benefits of demand-responsive approaches and cites the work of Black in noting that 'service providers struggle to be effective when they ignore, or try to create demand, but they have a greater rate of success if services are tailored to local consumer realities, particularly in terms of cost and service level' (Black 1998, p. 56 in Moran 2006, p. 10).

Moran writes that the use of principles of demand-responsive services to an Indigenous context in Australia featured in a review (HREOC 2001) of the Water Report (FRDC 1994), where 'implicit in this paradigm shift is the substitution of the notion of "beneficiaries" of services with that of "consumers" of services. Where services are consumer driven, demand is more sophisticated than just an expression of need or desire. Effective demand implies the establishment of significant public appreciation of the value of different service options and an understanding by consumers of what they can and cannot afford, how the services they select work, and how their providers and managers are performing' (Moran 2006, p. 4).

Moran's conclusion is that: 'Whilst a significant relationship exists between demand and supply of services, the socio-political geographies involved preclude the simplistic application of an economic model' (2006, p. 19). His work contributes to the basis for Desert Services that Work, especially through guidance on approaches to analysing the subject: 'The path to an improved service system requires the integration of two different types of knowledge – local knowledge held by consumers and leaders; and administrative knowledge held by service-providers – situated in the demand and supply sides respectively. Previous attempts at reform have largely been based on administrative knowledge, from the supply side of service delivery, or in reaction to political pressure from Indigenous advocates. The concept of "demand responsive services" provides an analytical basis to bring these two types of knowledge together' (2006, p. 19).

The Year One Report for Desert Services that Work (Moran et al. 2009) also addresses the subject of demand responsiveness of services. A summary of that report is beyond the scope of this review.

2.4 Conclusion

Spend a short period of time working in remote services and it soon becomes apparent that many of the same topics arise in any discussion of ‘what’s wrong and what needs to be done to put it right’. A key theme emerging from our review of the literature is about the most suitable point in the service system for decisions to be made about service design and implementation. The commentary on regional networks, the allocation of funds and the capacity for governance relate to this central issue of decision making. Underlying it is the broad ideological question of the ‘size’ of government and its ability to make decisions on behalf of citizens, which itself draws on debates about whether service users are citizens with rights, consumers making choices, or a combination of the two.

The nature of accountability is also fundamental to the literature on services. On the one hand, there is the question of the direction in which accountability for service performance should flow: to government, to service users, or both. This issue may be characterised as a tension between the control of services by government in a way that prioritises consistent standards, and the place of individuals, family and community voices in influencing the scope and nature of services in each location. The contradictions inherent in this issue are affected by the type of service (especially whether it is a regulatory service and the relevance of the service to local priorities), the size of the community, its remoteness and the strength of local governance arrangements.

3. Context

In this section, we provide a brief introduction to each location at which research was conducted.

3.1 Ali Curung and Lajamanu, Northern Territory

In the NT, we conducted research in two remote Aboriginal communities: Ali Curung in the Barkly Shire and Lajamanu in the Central Desert Shire. Ali Curung is a community of approximately 400 Aboriginal people situated 370 kilometres north of Alice Springs and approximately 175 kilometres south of Tennant Creek.² Ali Curung is a part of the Warrabri Aboriginal Land Trust, approximately 106 square kilometres in area.

The proportions of different language speakers at Ali Curung have been changing over time. In earlier accounts of Ali Curung, residents were predominantly from four main language groups: Warlpiri, Kaytetye, Alyawarra and Warramungu. A 1980 land claim report from the Office of Aboriginal Land Commission identifies the Ali Curung population being comprised of 35% Warlpiri, 20% Warramungu, 15% Kaytetye and 30% Alyawarra people. Today, there are few Warramungu speakers who reside in Ali Curung as they have moved to other areas, including Mungkarta at McClaren Creek and the surrounding areas and township of Tennant Creek. Ali Curung has always been dominated by families from the Warlpiri speaking language group, although there are now more mixed language groups than previously identified.

Lajamanu is a community of approximately 1200 people on the northern edge of the Tanami Desert in the Northern Territory. The community is located about 550 kilometres south-west of Katherine and over 900 kilometres by road north-west of Alice Springs. It was previously known as Hooker Creek, and is on the traditional country of the Gurindji people. It is located on the Hooker Creek Land Trust, and the community itself straddles the borders between the Central Desert Shire, which is based in Alice Springs, and Victoria-Daly Shire, based in Katherine. That is, many of the services, particularly power, water and waste disposal, are physically located across the border in the Victoria-Daly Shire, although responsibility for them and the community is under the Central Desert Shire.

Lajamanu is a strong traditional community and has maintained a strong sense of cultural identity, helped by the settlement's remoteness and its linguistic stability. The language spoken is Warlpiri, with Warlpiri residents predominating. Although it is traditionally Gurindji land, Gurindji is an endangered language, with only 60 full speakers remaining (Meakins 2008).

Elvin et al. 2010 is the full report on the research conducted at Ali Curung and Lajamanu.

3.2. Camooweal and Dajarra, Western Queensland

The western Queensland case studies are focused on the upper Georgina River basin in an area currently defined by Aboriginal mobility and cultural patterns. This basin straddles the Northern Territory/Queensland border. Camooweal is an important border town located on one of the perennial Georgina River waterholes, whereas Dajarra is a town located on the eastern side of the basin, but is populated by Aboriginal people who migrated from another border township on the Georgina, Urandangie. At the time of first contact with Aboriginal people, the Georgina waterholes supported Aboriginal travel and trade, the Georgina being a trunk north-south travel route, and they were, and remain, important places of Aboriginal social interaction.

² Alyson Wright compiled this information on Ali Curung as part of the initial DKCRC research on shared responsibility agreements.

3.2.2 Myuma Pty Ltd

During the early 2000s, the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu Group of Traditional Owners at Camooweal used their Native Title Claim to secure an infrastructure facility in the form of a Main Roads Work Camp and had simultaneously established a contractual basis for both ongoing enterprise generation and Aboriginal service provision.

Myuma Pty Ltd (Myuma) was established in early 2002 and is a non-profit proprietary company, incorporated for the purposes of managing the business arm of the group's activities. Myuma Pty Ltd runs an enterprise operation (including labour and plant hire) and also employs and delivers accredited training programs to local Aboriginal people in civil construction work, mining and related support services, including horticulture, hospitality and catering.

Memmott (2010) reports on the research conducted with the Myuma Group.

3.2.3 Dajarra

Dajarra is a small, remote town located 150 kilometres south of Mt Isa, the latter being the regional business and service centre for north-west Queensland. Aboriginal people made up approximately 85% (151) of the population of the 178 residents of Dajarra, as of the 2006 census. This high Aboriginal proportion of the population is unusual in Queensland towns. The demographic composition of Dajarra compares with discrete Aboriginal settlements such as Doomadgee and Mornington Island, although these communities have much higher overall populations. In contrast to many of the discrete Aboriginal communities of the Gulf and Cape York Peninsula, over the last decade the population of Dajarra has declined slightly. Health, education and employment, as well as social factors, draw Dajarra people to Mt Isa.

O'Rourke (2011) reports on the research conducted at Dajarra.

3.3 Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, South Australia

The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands were first established in 1921 by the South Australian Government. Extended droughts in the 1920s and from 1956 to 1965 in their homelands in the Great Victoria and Gibson Deserts led many Pitjantjatjara, and their traditionally more westerly relations, the Ngaanyatjarra, to move east towards the railway between Adelaide and Alice Springs in search of food and water, thus mixing with the most easterly of the three, the Yankunytjatjara. They refer to themselves today as Anangu, which originally just meant people in general, but has now come to imply an Aboriginal person or, more specifically, a member of one of the groups that speaks a variety of the Western Desert language.

The Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act was passed on 19 March 1981, granting freehold title over 103,000 square kilometres of land in the far north-western corner of South Australia. The APY Lands are part of a much larger country of Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people which covers some 350,000 square kilometres of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The estimated total population in the APY Lands is 2,600, which comprises approximately 10% of the Aboriginal population of South Australia. The population is comparatively young with 34% aged under 15 and only some 9% over 55 years. The totally Anangu population in the cross-border region is estimated to be 5,000. There is a considerable mobility throughout the whole region, for family, ceremonial, access to services, and other purposes.

The main communities in the SA APY Lands region are Pukatja (Ernabella), Pipalyatjara, Kalka, Murputja homelands, Amata, Kaltjiti (Fregon), Iwantja (Indulkana), Mimili, Watarru, Anilalya homelands, Turkey Bore and Tjutjunpiri homelands. Umuwa is the administrative hub for the APY Lands and is where the APY Executive and a number of regional Anangu organisations have offices. Tedmanson et al. (2011) report on the research conducted on the APY Lands.

3.4 Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Western Australia

The Ngaanyatjarra Lands are located in a remote area of Western Australia, bordering the APY Lands of South Australia. Ngaanyatjarra is a dialect of the Western Desert language family. Most speakers of this language family, which includes Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara, live in the central desert of West Australia, the south-west corner of the Northern Territory and the north-west corner of South Australia. Similar to the use of the term Anangu on the APY Lands, the term ‘Yarnangu’ is commonly used throughout the Ngaanyatjarra lands to distinguish Ngaanyatjarra people from non-Aboriginal people, and from more distant Aboriginal people.

There are ten communities on the Lands: Blackstone (Papulankutja), Jameson (Mantamaru), Patjarr, Tjirrkarli, Tjukurla, Wanarn, Warakurna (Rockhole), Warburton, Wingellina (Irrunytju) and Kanpa. The combined population of all twelve communities on the lands was recently estimated to be 2,747 (Brooks & Kral 2007, p. 24). The two principle service organisations on the lands are the Ngaanyatjarra Council and the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku.

We have produced three working papers from the research conducted on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands (Sullivan 2010a, 2010b, 2011).

3.5 East Pilbara and Western Desert, Western Australia

We concentrated research within the East Pilbara and Western Desert region on the mining town of Newman, which also acts as the service centre for the Pilbara region in the north-west of Western Australia.

The Western Desert is located in the eastern aspect of the Pilbara and this forms the principal boundary of the research. It includes the communities of Newman, Jigalong and Parngurr. Local Martu people number between 600 and 800. They retain strong cultural connections, largely as a result of their only-recent contact with settler society. The Martu people in Newman are primarily located within East Newman in public housing and in Parnpajinya, a discrete town settlement located on the edge of Newman on the main highway. Although the Martu homelands lie east of Newman, the area of land around Newman has been passed to the Martu who are custodians of the land and Newman now serves as a major service node for the Western Desert.

McGrath et al. (2010) report on the research in the East Pilbara and Western Desert.

4. Research methods

The research methods we used for the Desert Services that Work project were determined by the field manual for the project (Moran & Staughton 2007) and draw on participatory, qualitative and social science approaches to research. We categorise our methods into three groups:

1. Observation, by researchers being present in a location and noting for themselves how elements of the service system or model function in practice. This includes observation of conversations and discussions between service users and providers, information provided on service policy and delivery, being present at council or other governance meetings and noting the ways in which people gain access to services, and use and adapt them locally.
2. Interaction with people through face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, workshops or a combination of these methods. To gain the most value from the interaction, researchers sometimes used techniques designed to focus the conversation or enable respondents to describe their experience. These included use of matrices or tables, drawing of flow charts, mapping, problem trees and other visual methods.
3. Use of documents such as minutes of meetings, correspondence and historical records, and quantitative data.

The Desert Knowledge CRC held a workshop on methodologies for Research Leaders on 2 June 2008. This workshop reviewed the methodologies used in DKCRC projects. Many principles about research methods are universal. However, the workshop attempted to consider the way these principles play out in desert regions in terms of the relative priority placed on some principles (e.g. engagement) over others, and the specific methods applied given factors such as large travel distances, small sample sizes, and cross-cultural communications needs (DKCRC 2008).

The workshop noted that engagement is critical to the effectiveness of our research, particularly to ensure:

1. the research is correctly focused toward the question at hand (i.e. scoping)
2. the data collection is conducted in a culturally and statistically appropriate manner
3. the analysis is focused and interpreted appropriately
4. the research outcomes have impact.

There are also cases where the engagement is trivial. For example, engagement may be as simple as liaising with a statistical bureau to obtain the appropriate data set. But for work with communities, the level of engagement that we sought and achieved in Desert Services that Work was critical.

The workshop also observed that research design in remote or desert settings in Australia needs to be adaptive. This implies:

- a need to test out methods at the start of the process, especially the best ways to engage and communicate with people and to ensure that learning is taken on in future work
- that research is designed with the people who will use it
- reciprocity, with the researcher needing to offer tangible assistance to people he or she is working with (as described in the earlier section of this report on our work with communities)
- the importance of building relationships
- flexibility, adaptive and iterative approaches
- working with methodological guidelines for the research rather than strict rules.

It is not possible to generalise across the research conducted within Desert Services that Work since some activities were mainly desk-based (the service modelling project, for example). However, for the fieldwork associated with research in desert settlements, the observations on methodology above applied consistently across the work that we did.

4.1 Ali Curung and Lajamanu, Northern Territory

The project examined the implementation of new Northern Territory Government model(s) of housing tenancy and asset management across the shire and community levels of governance with a view to mapping accountability and the role of tenant demand as an interface between demand and supply issues. Research was undertaken over the period August 2008 to December 2009, a time of significant program and policy changes in Aboriginal affairs, particularly in the Northern Territory, and particularly in relation to housing, land tenure and governance structures.

The research focused on the impact of changes to housing tenancy and asset management as a result of the formation of new Shires and the transfer of housing stock from Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs) to Territory Housing. Research was undertaken at Ali Curung and Lajamanu and with the Barkly and Central Desert Shires, with householders in each community (demand side) as well as with staff of relevant local and Territory agencies (supply side). The research approach elicits a comparison between two Shires with different attributes and between two communities with different levels of housing intervention (upgrades and major capital works), and different proximities (close and very distant) to the Shire administrative centres.

The research used a multifaceted and tiered approach to information gathering, with distinct demand-side and supply-side approaches triangulated where appropriate with available quantitative data sets and literature. The research was broadly based on the principles of action research in order to capture learnings as changes to tenancy management and repairs and maintenance were implemented, and to provide critical point information and resources to enhance communication and understanding between both demand and supply-side actors and agencies. The research also had a temporal dimension in that semi-structured interviews with community residents (householders) were repeated three times over a twelve-month period to capture policy and program adaptation and responsiveness at the local level.

With the shift of housing and asset management responsibility from Indigenous Community Housing Organisations to Territory Housing (tenancy management) and the new Shires (asset management and maintenance), baseline mapping of current tenancy arrangements, policies, housing stock, condition and repair schedules and allocations was undertaken through the initial survey with community residents (householders) and through semi-structured interviews with relevant local and Territory government staff. The baseline mapping survey (round one interviews with householders and other relevant publicly available data) constitutes the benchmark against which changes observed or reported over the life of the project have been measured.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with similar ‘pools’ of individuals (householders) in each of the communities and with a range of service providers and agents (government staff) who were identified as stakeholders in housing tenancy and asset management. While interviews with community residents successfully captured the same pool of individuals (householders) – albeit with some attrition – across the three demand-side surveys, interviews with supply-side agents exhibited greater variation reflecting the high rates of staff turnover within government organisations, within staff positions on communities or within related agencies. Interviews with supply-side agents thus targeted positions with particular policy or service delivery responsibility rather than tracking the same individual over time. By tracking the sequence of tenancy management practices and experiences over time, including the

effects of staffing change or household fluctuations, the research has also provided relevant information in a timely manner to supply- and demand-side actors and agencies.

The supply-side semi-structured interviews were undertaken with individuals holding key responsibilities for housing tenancy management, repairs and maintenance across government and non-government agencies, and included interviews with Shire staff, Territory Housing staff, SIHIP managers, Central Land Council (CLC) Staff and subcontractors.

Demand-side semi-structured interviews, facilitated by community-based researchers were undertaken with a range of householders in each community. The interviews captured the ‘house story’, including whom the householders themselves saw as comprising their household (recognising kinship responsibilities), trends in household occupancy over time, how house responsibilities are managed (rents, amenity), efficiency of repair and maintenance regimes, overcrowding adaptations, house allocation processes, and residents’ awareness of housing tenancy management changes and housing investment programs (e.g. SIHIP) underway, as well as their impact. Interviews often occurred with groups of ‘householders’ allowing for a depth of input and the comfort of the participants who usually prefer to have family members present when talking to non-Aboriginal people. Community researchers also facilitated interviews occurring in language and provided appropriate interpretation and translation. Householder interviews were repeated three times over the twelve-month period and thus tracked the range of changes occurring from the perspective of residents.

4.2 Western Queensland

For the research in Camooweal, we developed a case study of the Myuma Group as an example of Aboriginal cultural and socio-economic empowerment situated within both the fields of service delivery and of mainstream economy. The Myuma Group is comprised of three inter-linked Aboriginal corporations centred on the upper Georgina River in far western Queensland, which were established by the local traditional owners, the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu people. Methods included a historical survey from records maintained by traditional owners; a study of the operations of the company from its own documentation; observation of the activities of the Directors, staff, trainees and people associated with Myuma; and interviews with key stakeholders. This component of the western Queensland study was carried out by Paul Memmott, the team leader for this regional focus group.

In Dajarra, responses to the research questions for Desert Services that Work are derived from an analysis of the interactions that take place between the Aboriginal residents and service providers. The research largely drew on the relationship of the water supply to Aboriginal housing and energy use, and the implications of these services for the environmental health and the sustainability of the community, combined with the relative novelty of Dajarra as an ‘Aboriginal town’. Dajarra has a history of an inadequate supply of water, which is also of sub-standard quality, and the history of this problem casts some light on service interactions between the Aboriginal population and service agencies. In addition, the research aimed to elicit recommendations that could improve the supply of services to Aboriginal communities and organisations in the arid regions of Australia, delivering practical benefits to communities. In Dajarra, the specific aim was to identify solutions to the problem of adequate drinking water supply and the array of problems associated the current town supply.

In the first part of the research at Dajarra (which preceded the period covered by this report), Stephen Long used interviews, surveys on the quality and use of water, and observations of the use of housing by Aboriginal people in Dajarra over periods of fieldwork across a decade. In Long’s earlier Core Project 5 (CP5) study of services to Aboriginal people in Dajarra, members of the Jimberella Cooperative prioritised the town water supply in a list of services that required improvement (Long 2007, p. 11). This was followed by recreation facilities, housing and the desire to establish an outstation on the Georgina River.

The second phase of the CP5 project, the main subject of this report, was informed by a combination of interviews, consultants' reports, and a review of literature. Tim O'Rourke conducted interviews with Dajarra community leaders, the Dajarra school principal, the mayor of Cloncurry Shire, and the local state member of Parliament. Staff at the Mt Isa office of FaHCSIA provided information on the history of attempts to resolve the problem of the water supply in Dajarra. Staff from State departments and statutory authorities gave background information to recent legislation and the aims of policy that related to water and Aboriginal programs. Ms Julia Shadlow-Bath, the Community Relations Adviser from local mining company Incitec Pivot Ltd, provided information on the contribution of the company's effort to fund improvements to infrastructure in Dajarra.

Members of the Jimberella Cooperative worked as community-based researchers. They also produced a video to record semi-structured interviews with eight Aboriginal residents of Dajarra (Jimberella Cooperative 2010). This process revealed data on the history of the supply of water in Dajarra as well as further information and Aboriginal perceptions of the problems associated with the use of bore water, particularly in relation to housing. Keith Marshall was instrumental in both arranging the interviews and questioning his fellow Dajarra residents on camera about their knowledge of the history and consequences of the problem water. The video is available from DKCRC or through its website www.desertknowledgecrc.com.au.

The effects of the town water on infrastructure were recorded during visual inspections of the housing and public buildings in Dajarra. Contributing specifically to this project, Beth Rounsefell, an environmental engineer from the University of Queensland, visited Dajarra to produce a brief, largely qualitative audit of energy, water and waste disposal of Aboriginal houses and the Jimberella community hall and offices (Rounsefell 2009). Despite the duration of the Dajarra water problem, documentation relating to the administration and supply of the water service, and community meetings, and reports by consultants were difficult to source.

4.3 Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, South Australia

The research method adopted for work on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands was to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the PY Ku Remote Transaction Centre Program. A comprehensive review of documentation of PY Ku from inception to implementation was undertaken. Key levers, success factors and critical points of change were identified to assess their impact on remote service delivery to the target settlements. Extended narrative interviews and discussions within communities were held with key Anangu leaders and with both Anangu and non-Anangu key players involved at all levels of the PY Ku Program to develop a rich overview of the dynamics involved in the implementation of what is a complex and multi-faceted initiative.

In line with the need to be adaptive to changing circumstances and conditions described at the beginning of this section, our ability to conduct the evaluation was hampered by delays in the implementation of the PY Ku Program. The modified objectives of the research then became:

1. To provide an understanding of the background and reasons for delayed implementation, especially through analysis of the dynamic between governments and communities and reciprocal responsibilities and expectations.
2. To identify strengths, weaknesses and key learnings that can be garnered from the development of a PY Ku network on the APY Lands.
3. To explore supply- and demand-side influences, factors and perspectives on the implementation of the program.
4. To assess the impact of the PY Ku network in communities where Centres are located, the potential for its further development, and its relevance to current debates about remote service delivery to desert settlements.

The research focused mainly on user perspectives of the PY Ku Program and its services during its early phase of implementation, especially through interviews and discussions with individuals. However, ongoing concerns from the implementing agency, PY Media, about the possibility of government support for the program not being renewed after the first term led us to become involved in meetings on the sustainability of the services. This provided insight into the challenges for government and service providers in achieving a sustainable service model.

4.4 Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Western Australia

Research on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands was based on a case study of the Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) entered into by three tiers of government and the not-for-profit organisation Ngaanyatjarra Council in 2005. In 2004 the government abolished the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and announced a policy of whole-of-government service delivery to Aboriginal settlements.

Our aim was to examine the Regional Partnership Agreement and its results as a means of exploring three topics:

1. the process of translating policy direction and resource allocation to service delivery through levels of bureaucratic administration
2. the existing role of the Indigenous sector and its potential to play an increased part in desert services
3. the current policy environment and the trend towards normalisation of services through the Indigenous Reform Agreement and its component COAG partnership agreements.

Fieldwork on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands involved interviews with people active in the implementation of the RPA and its associated Shared Responsibility Agreements, together with an assessment of progress based on documents associated with the process. Wider lessons for service delivery in remote areas are drawn from this analysis, with a focus on exploring the three topics above.

4.5 East Pilbara and Western Desert, Western Australia

The objective of the research was to examine the factors and processes that determine the boundaries of Martu people's representation within service arrangements for Aboriginal people in the Western Desert of Australia.

Research methods were used in a participatory action framework which allowed a strong focus on government and non-government service providers. These included comprehensive semi-structured interviews with supply-side actors in service delivery in Newman, participatory observation, issues mapping at Newman, a water audit at Parngurr, and a housing audit of Martu housing in Newman. An important aspect of the research was the employment and training of Martu researchers, who became integral to the delivery of these methods.

The research made extensive use of tools developed for the purpose or adapted from other settings, including:

- timelines to describe the developments in family and community over time and how they relate to the housing
- house pictures as a means of exploring the way in which the house is used in different situations
- institutional mapping to work out who has authority and roles in relation to housing, what they do and how this works in practice
- problem trees for exploring the problems connected with housing and to establish which ones are most significant or represent priorities to be addressed.

Fieldwork enabled a picture of the service system for housing to be developed. Close collaboration with Martu people and organisations, together with ongoing discussions with BHP Billiton on its approach to services in the region, strengthened our analysis.

4.6. PhD research

The project team for Desert Services that Work included three PhD students: Elizabeth Ganter, Jenine Godwin and Annie Kennedy. The research they carried out contributed to the overall project, especially through team meetings, comments on other work and direct contributions to research such as the service modelling work. The three theses are:

Ganter E. *An Ambivalent Hospitality: Aboriginal senior public servants and the representation of others in Australia's self-governing Northern Territory.*

Aboriginal public sector employment policies invite Aborigines to represent the absent by their presence in the corridors of power and their contribution to Aboriginal policies and programs. What happens when Aboriginal public servants seek to be heard as Aborigines in public service departments, or even when they seek not to be heard as Aborigines? Analysing data from 76 interviewees, all of them participants in the Northern Territory Public Service at some stage since self-government in 1978, the thesis asks: how compelling to Aboriginal senior officials is the Northern Territory Government's account of itself as a representative bureaucracy?

The thesis explores the extent to which Aboriginal senior officials have accepted or resisted their invitation to be representative of Northern Territory Aborigines and the meaning of their self-accounts as role models. The thesis argues that Aboriginal senior officials work to a social imaginary in which they are present and other Aborigines are absent only by circumstance. Aboriginal senior public servants see themselves as neither the naïve tokens nor the self-interested advocates that the literature has largely made them out to be. They presented themselves through interviews as grounded public servants who work to build and maintain mutual relations with those they represent.

(Abstract from unpublished PhD thesis)

Kennedy A. *Aboriginal Engagement in the Context of Services to Remote Outstations in Central Australia.*

Examination of interactions between supply and demand for services to remote settlements provided by Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre

Indigenous engagement is a feature of government policy rhetoric. But what does engagement look like from the perspective of Aboriginal people? Positioned within a critical Indigenous methodology, which is relational and privileges Aboriginal voices, the study examines how Aboriginal staff and leaders in a remote outstation area in the Central Desert engaged with governments' efforts to improve their lives. Events associated with the Commonwealth's Northern Territory Emergency Response and the Territory Government's local government reforms over the period 2006 – June 2008 form the background to the study. Understanding how outstation residents perceived, understood, and responded to these events sheds light on what works and what doesn't in outsider efforts to promote Aboriginal engagement in programs and services.

Findings are presented through Aboriginal narratives, inter-woven with observations of everyday Western Aranda life and the service delivery environment at a remote Outstation Resource Centre. These reveal how outstation men and women struggled to understand and accommodate policy change in the context of their responsibilities for country and family.

The research also finds that at the point of program delivery, the conditions that might foster Aboriginal engagement have to do with people feeling trust, comfort, and safety. These emotions are linked to relational ways of being associated with place, family and

the familiar. An understanding of these features of engagement, however, and the time, processes and administrative structures needed to support them, are largely absent in Indigenous program design and delivery.

Further, the research finds that Commonwealth and Territory Government agencies assumed Aboriginal understanding of government policy intentions and requirements. In the research site, however, Aboriginal people struggled to comprehend what was taking place, with communication difficulties compounded by different conceptual understandings. This created particular difficulties for outstation people when engaging in the public domain. Speaking up and speaking out, an assumed feature of the most basic consultation processes used in participatory democratic practice, was further complicated by Western Aranda cultural practice regarding rights and authority to speak and represent.

Understanding how Aboriginal people themselves see conditions under which they engage with the programs and services meant to benefit them may help inform Indigenous program and service delivery approaches. To do this, however, governments, researchers and other outsiders will also need to accommodate relational processes that better support people to represent their views. Most importantly, outsiders will need to understand that the conditions for Aboriginal wellbeing cannot be determined and managed from afar.

(Abstract from unpublished PhD thesis)

Godwin J. *Delivering Healthy Housing to Aboriginal Communities in Remote North West Queensland.*

Examining how people in Dajarra and Urandangi in western Queensland use their house or living space, including a model that links with questions of service delivery.

We wish to acknowledge Annie Kennedy, Elizabeth Ganter and Jenine Godwin with thanks for their commitment to the work and their contributions to the overall research team.

The preceding section has focused on field research methods used in locations in the four jurisdictions in which researchers worked. Methods used in the service modelling research are described in the next section of the report.

5. Service models

5.1. Factors affecting development and choice of service model

A service is defined as the process by which individuals, households and communities gain access to goods and facilities that they require to live and work. The purpose of this section of the report is to provide a description of the types of service that are used in desert Australia.

The approach to service delivery taken in remote communities is determined by:

1. the scope and nature of the service
2. the funding arrangements for the service
3. the technical or specialist capacity required to provide the service
4. historical precedent
5. the influence of service users
6. the cost of service provision
7. government policy directions and priorities
8. management and governance arrangements.

A service model is an arrangement by which a service provider enables users to gain access to a service or set of services. Service models either evolve over time through the interplay of the factors above or they are determined by the way in which a service is designed and established by providers. As a result, a large number of service models exist across remote Australia. Taken as a whole, they present a complex and sometimes fragmented set of arrangements.

5.2 Service typology

This typology categorises services according to the mode by which the service is delivered.

5.2.1 National private sector providers

Telephone and broadband are the most obvious examples of services that are most efficiently delivered through national networks. The service model that applies in this case is one of centrally defined and managed services to national standards determined through legislation. In the case of telephones, provision is defined by the Universal Service Obligation (USO) that requires access to a telephone in population centres of a certain size, regardless of remoteness.

Staff are town-based and travel to remote settlements to conduct maintenance, repairs and other technical work. Adaptations for local use may be limited in scope but are feasible and can have a positive impact on the access and value of the service to users. The Community Phone Project implemented by CAT in partnership with Telstra is a case in point, where provision of a protective shield for the telephone and inclusion of a single button for access to phonecard service has improved the technology for use in some remote settings.

5.2.2 Resource centres

Resource centres are generally Aboriginal-governed organisations with the status of incorporated associations or wholly owned private companies. They maintain a technical competence and capacity across a range of essential services that are provided to defined clusters of communities, most often outstation groups, but also larger communities such as those on the APY Lands. Examples are PY Services and Pilbara Meta Maya. These services include maintenance for housing, bores, diesel generator, wind or solar electricity supply, fencing, firebreaks, airstrips, access and internal roads,

community facilities such as bough shelters and so on. New capital works are generally subcontracted to private contracting companies. Funding varies across a range of State and Territory funding arrangements and user-pays models.

Characteristics of this service model are opportunities for local employment, especially through cooperation and overlap with work-for-dole and training programs, and potential for long-term relationships between service providers and users. Governance arrangements can enable local residents to be directly involved as board or management committee members.

5.2.3 Transaction centres

This mode of access to services relies on broadband internet access and a suitable building housing equipment, technical support and customer service. This model is more common in tropical Queensland and in the Kimberley than in desert regions, with Ringer Soak in WA and several Cape York communities offering good examples. More recently, the pilot PY Ku program in South Australia offers an example of a remote desert service for the population of six major communities in the APY Lands.

Modes of governance for remote transaction centres vary. In Western Australia, governance is through direct government provision. By contrast, PY Ku is governed and managed through PY Media, an Aboriginal corporation. Features of remote transaction centres as a service model are:

- they are restricted to services that can be delivered via internet, which are often regulatory (e.g. motor vehicle licences, some Centrelink services)
- the experience of service users is largely determined by the quality of the equipment and the responsiveness of staff
- potential for local employment is good given the need for customer service staff in each centre.

Funding for remote transaction centres combines State and Federal support with fees charged on a per-use basis.

5.2.4 Local private contractors

Private contractors contribute to remote service delivery as a result of a specialist technical need. Examples are contractors in building and construction, electricity and water supply, satellite installation, and maintenance for communication services.

Much like any arrangement with a contractor, the scope of works defines the activities undertaken. Contractors and their staff are almost always town-based and travel from there to service smaller communities. Exceptions include locally based private contractors, which range from small family enterprises in plumbing and electrical work to larger private entities that may be Aboriginal-controlled, such as Myuma Pty Ltd. As such, openings for local employment vary.

5.2.5 Programs specific to Aboriginal people

For services that are specifically aimed at Aboriginal people, government programs are sometimes defined in a way that includes consultation and governance arrangements specifically designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal service users. Examples include Bushlight (energy services for small communities), Fixing Houses for Better Health, the Strategic Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP), and a myriad of culture-related, law and justice, natural resource management, small enterprise, and housing-related programs. Again, depending on the specific program, funding is derived from State, Territory or Federal Government departments.

5.2.6 Specialist Aboriginal corporations

Although similar to Aboriginal-specific programs in their focus on meeting the needs of Aboriginal people, specialist Aboriginal corporations are distinguished by being independent and incorporated under State or Territory legislation and not restricted to a particular fixed timeframe or budget

determined by government. They often have a geographic or thematic specialisation and expertise to match. Examples are Tangentyere Council (services to the Alice Springs town camps), the land councils and the Institute for Aboriginal Development (IAD).

Governed through boards made up of Aboriginal people and with a higher representation of Aboriginal people on the staff than comparable non-Aboriginal corporations, these organisations offer services that are determined by their constitutions and funded through a combination of self-generated income, government funds, payments by users and contracted work, depending on the kind of service.

5.2.7 Local government agencies and community councils

As a level of local government, community councils are a means of providing access to services that are governed and managed in the community. These services may include a range of minor works, repairs and maintenance to housing and infrastructure, youth and childcare services, natural resource management and other services for which local skills are available.

Local employment opportunities are likely to be higher in community council-managed services and responsiveness to local needs and demand also better than services provided externally, although this may not be the case where local governance and decision making is inefficient or skills and capacity inconsistent. The local democratic process also offers potential for local residents to influence service effectiveness through elections to council seats.

5.2.8 Non-government and public benevolent institutions (NGOs and PBIs)

Organisations established to provide particular services sometimes find a niche role in desert Australia as part of their broader remit nationally or internationally. These often include health and caring services such as those provided by Mission Australia, the Salvation Army or the Fred Hollows Foundation. Or they may be emergency services specific to remote Australia, such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

In many cases, NGOs and PBIs subcontract services in the way that private contractors do. This takes place for aged care facilities, for example, or particular mental health services. Funding arrangements for NGOs and PBIs vary. Most generate income from their own fundraising work from corporate and individual sources. Many also work effectively as contractors for Federal Government services or receive Commonwealth grants to support their work.

5.2.9 Federal government agencies

Most Federal government services are regulatory services accessed through direct telephone or office contact, internet or through remote transaction centres of the kind described earlier in this paper. The most common examples are benefits provided by Centrelink. As these are standardised and nationally determined services, the scope for negotiation and flexibility in delivery is limited.

5.2.10 State and Territory Government agencies and statutory authorities

Through their own agencies, State and Territory Governments provide a high proportion of local services in desert Australia. Access to services takes place through government staff working in health and education (e.g. at schools, hospitals and clinics), sport and recreation, housing, energy, water and a range of other services. The PowerWater Corporation is an example in the Northern Territory, along with the Aboriginal Lands Protection Authority, but there exists a multitude of services grouped within the relevant government department across all states.

5.3 Service system research

The objective of our research on service systems was to develop a software-based model that would enable analysis and generate insights into the key factors affecting service effectiveness through a focus mainly on housing but including consideration of water, waste water, energy, communication, transportation and associated infrastructure.

The research was largely supply-side oriented, concentrating on service delivery models for remote desert settlements. We collected data and information on the range of government services for remote settlements. Attempts were made to identify specific sources of data and capture some of this information for modelling purposes.

The project took a macro view of institutions and funding for Aboriginal service delivery and analysis outputs, but modelling was carried out at a micro level. The input data was drawn from publicly available documents and support from the service provision agencies, while the analysis relied on data collected by jurisdictional studies detailing settlement infrastructure, condition and service provision. Effort was directed towards a review of existing policy for delivery of services. However, this is a highly dynamic space and maintaining a state of currency proved difficult.

The project explored a range of specific service delivery models and reviewed a typology of service delivery models which served as a basis for the modelling component and to support future development. From the preliminary activities a conceptual system model of the service provision was developed. Outputs from the project included a final report and a software-based system model capturing the complexity and dynamics of the service system. The latter is described in the next section.

5.4 Software-based service modelling

5.4.1 Service process

A review of government service provision to Aboriginal people (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGSP] 2008) indicates that the process of service provision begins with a program or policy which sets out the objectives, the service process to be invoked, and outcomes to be achieved. These outcomes are influenced by a range of externalities. This model is provided in Figure 5.1 below.

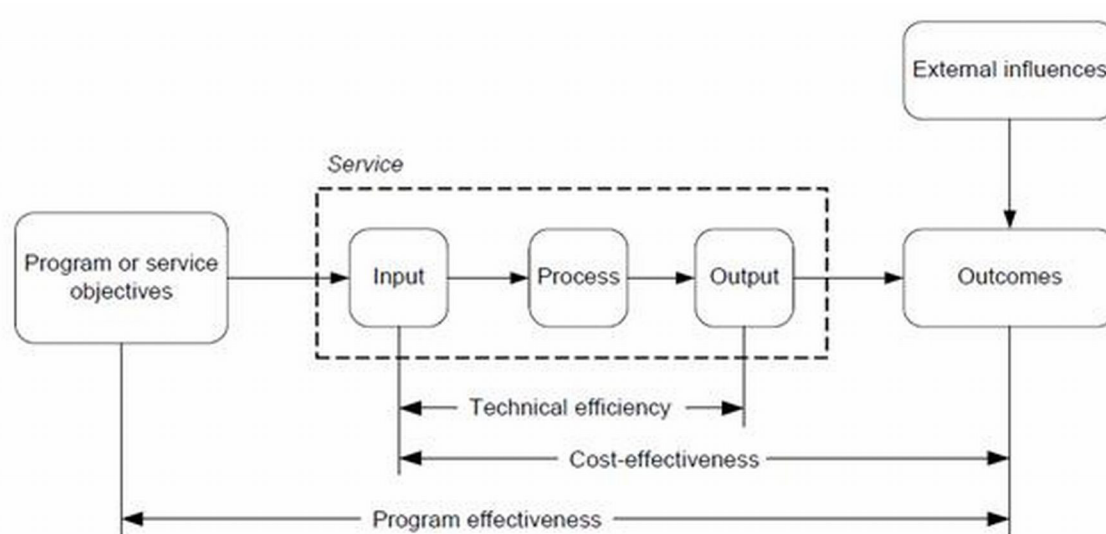


Figure 5.1: The service process

Source: SCRGSP 2008

This model is the basis for the performance indicators in the complex model that we developed. Referring to the diagram (Figure 5.1), there are three measures that can be captured: program effectiveness, cost effectiveness and delivery efficiency. Indicators of these vary dependent on the program objectives and delivery model employed. They should be selected to reflect existing reporting and data flows where possible. The Review on Government Service Provision by Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP 2008) summarises a range of data currently captured for reporting requirements on services. It notes that very few measures relating to efficiency and effectiveness have been documented and there is no discussion of service standards.

The system we chose for examination in the development of a software-based model was the housing system in remote communities of approximately 200+ persons. We were interested in the impacts on occupants' health within remote communities from housing and associated infrastructure. This system was selected with the aim of testing the potential of improved housing and health outcomes from varied service delivery models in the housing and essential services sector. The community size of 200 was chosen in part to exclude small outstations/homelands for modelling simplicity.

The system can be represented as a complex system using a complex system software platform for model development. A modular approach was implemented during the development, allowing extensions in future development or versions which might include different community sizes and other parameters such as education and training to be added in future versions.

The objective of the modeling was to provide a vehicle to aid understanding of the system but not to predict the future. The focus here is on a small part of the system, an approach which is useful for scenario and policy development. More detailed analysis would be reliant on fine-resolution data.

5.4.2 Abstract system model

In order to capture the actors in the system it was important to first develop an abstract model of the system and then to conceptualise the roles of the actors and agents, their behaviour and any interactions within it. In this example, the aim of the model is to provide the maximum service quality (measured by effectiveness) for the minimum cost (measured by efficiency). An abstract model of the system is captured in Figure 5.2 below.

$$f[Policy] \bullet f[ServiceDelivery] \bullet f[enduser] = Service(effectiveness, efficiency)$$

$$\Rightarrow \max|serviceeffectiveness, serviceefficiency|$$

Figure 5.2: Abstract service system model

This equation describes the system as a function of policy with a functional relation of the service delivery combined with a function of the end-user environment which results in a service outcome. The service output is measured by efficiency and effectiveness and our aim is to maximise both. A change in any of the input parameters can lead to a different outcome, but not always. The three ovals depict the context boundaries or constraints for the components which impact on their ability to influence the service outcomes. In some instances there is significant overlap while at other times the interaction between the contexts is minimal. The arrows reflect a more direct relationship between the policy and end-user environments.

5.4.3 Agent-based model

The process of developing a software-based model continues through a conceptual model. In this stage, questions, agents and behaviours are identified and the model grounded. In this version of the model, the 'end' is an individual, although this is not necessarily the case for variations of this model.

Users may be nested in terms of their behaviour, as may be the case in a household situation, or largely independent as may be the case when using water or power or other utilities. This model can be duplicated as required and combined to simulate multiple service systems acting on an individual actor.

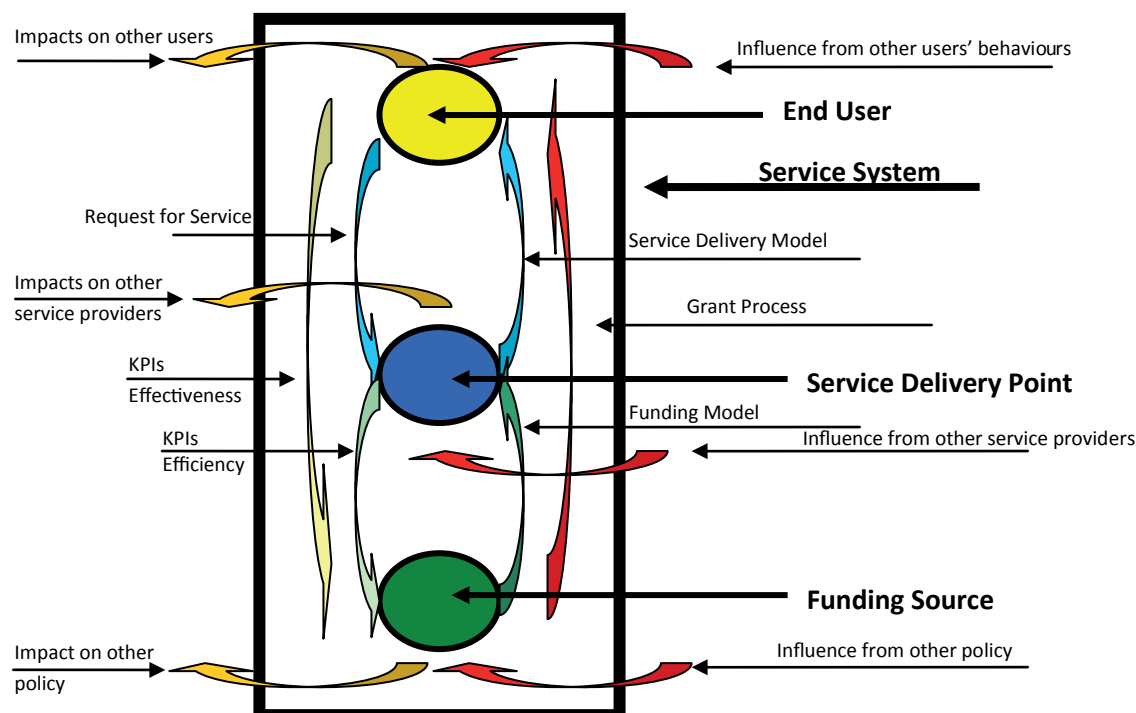


Figure 5.3: Conceptual agent-based model of the lifecycle of a single service system

In the agent-based model (Figure 5.3) the three functional inputs of the abstract are connected through a series of ‘events’. The boundary is the service system and there are a range of inputs and outputs across the boundary.

Specific policy is contained within the system boundary; however, the policies developed may impact on other sectors as other policies will impact on the system of interest. The policy node is connected to the service delivery node through a funding model and the feedback loop is represented as a range of key performance indicators (KPIs).

The end user and the service delivery point are connected through an expression of demand and service delivery through a specific model. This does not imply that there is no role in the service delivery for the end user. Again, across the boundaries are influences and impacts from outside the system. For simplicity, we decided that these influences will be minimal and managed. There is also a connection from the end user and policy, represented here as effectiveness KPIs and grant process.

Considerations beyond the abstract include a context layer which adds yet another layer of complexity to the system. The funding component is linked to a political context while the end user is immersed in a context where parameters of influence include access, education, environment and cultural influences, and others which all impact on the end user’s ability to request/receive and consume the service. It would seem that the component with the greatest opportunity to influence the service outcome is the service agent where there is potential for overlap in the contexts with both of the other actors. Some of the contextual issues facing the service agent include remoteness, settlement size and access. These may be able to be captured in the model through introduction of a settlement type.

5.4.4 Case study on housing and health

To develop and test the approach we considered a case study for the delivery of housing services and associated power and water services. Major drivers for this choice were the potential for access to data and familiarity of the system for the researchers, which would allow meaningful sensitivity analysis. The existing research in a location in western Queensland presented a useful example, since it involves two jurisdictions delivering these services, and may offer contrasting input/output relationships.

The focus for the case study is the system as it affects the health of occupants or, more specifically, the management of the housing system and resultant impacts on the occupants' health. An understanding of the system and data for aspects of the system was required to reproduce a simplified version of the system. The mind map below (Figure 5.4) represents the wider system from which the main components of interest have been identified inside the blue dotted circle.

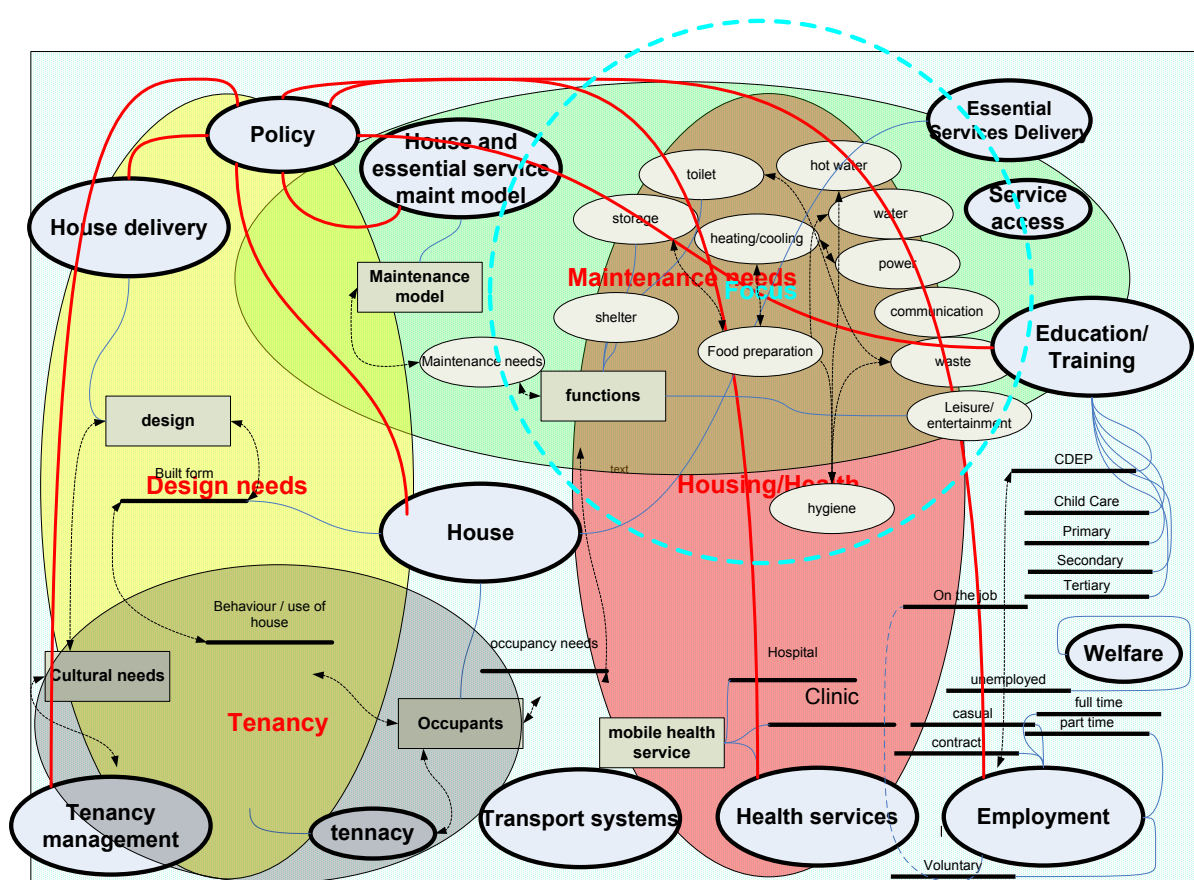


Figure 5.4: Conceptual system map for a case study on housing and health

The map in Figure 5.4 captures the home and housing components perceived to be most associated with health and hygiene outcomes, including the infrastructure to support the outcomes sought. Other aspects such as design and occupancy management were left outside of the focus area despite the opportunity for improved outcomes as the model is attempting to represent the current status. The potential for adding improved design/tenancy management to test outcomes may be considered in future versions of the model.

The model seeks to simulate this focused system. To achieve the improved outcomes, both housing and health outcomes, components within a home and infrastructure support must be available and maintained. This provides the basis but requires support for occupants where uses of household components and/or healthy living practices are not well understood.

One of the aims of this research is to test whether changes in the housing services delivery model can impact on occupants' health. The model was developed specifically with the following key questions in mind:

- What is the effect of the number of houses in the system on the health of the residents?
- What is the impact of an increased maintenance budget?
- What would be the likely effect of improved living skills?
- What is the net impact on visitors to the system?
- Are other service delivery models likely to result in better outcomes?

Data used in this model was largely captured from existing reports including the work of McPeake and Pholeros (2005). However, data for areas such as relationships and behaviours was difficult to capture and therefore was developed based on discussions with other DKCRC researchers working closely with residents of remote communities. For a full development version, more formal methods for data collection will be required.

5.4.5 Constraints and limitations

As discussed, the system being modelled is highly complex and as such it is challenging to model every aspect to reflect reality. In an attempt to achieve a workable model, a number of constraints were implemented which resulted in a simplified representation of the system. The constraints included the use of set property values from a small but representative set rather than using the full range of potential property values, and a small range of values for repair costs rather than connecting to a database of costs or a statistical distribution from which costs could be generated. Further events such as breakdown frequency and maintenance scheduling were simulated using simple queuing models.

The most significant limitation of the model is coding for the behavioural aspects of the model. That is, where individuals are to respond to stimulus, only a range of response options can be included, particularly in this development version. The reality is that the true response may be an irrational response and may not even be able to be known let alone included as a response option. Further, including a likelihood distribution of a given response will be approximately correct for a specific point in time and individual or for a simulated study of a group of individuals; however, it is very likely to be incorrect for all of the individuals. Given that the process of building the model is based on a disaggregation of the system, it is likely that components of the system which impact on the complexity have not been included or not given suitable consideration. These system components may well be identified in a model review or future development process. This version has not undergone any verification, validation or calibration.

Ultimately the model must be verified by checking that it behaves as expected under a range of input parameters, including extreme values and large numbers of simulated runs to test model stability. It is not unusual for a complex model to produce unexpected results which may be counterintuitive, but this may in fact be an accurate representation of the system. In this instance, given the reliance on observed and expected input parameters rather than data-driven parameters based on behaviors, a challenge is to interpret or not misinterpret the output from alternative strategies. At this point it is expected that ad hoc and unexplainable outputs could be generated due to issues from interaction effects, heterogeneity and interdependencies not foreseen. Care will need to be taken to evaluate initial conditions for scenarios.

Once the model is functioning as expected the structure and parameters can be calibrated for external validation. This is often a trade-off between inclusion of ‘real world’ elements and model simplicity. A clear focus on the purpose can guide the choice of inclusion. Again, many simulations will be required to test assumptions as well as sensitivity analysis to test model robustness, followed by analysis of variation from the outputs before the model can be used confidently for the designed purpose. Significant in the model will be the measures of success. Currently a range of key performance indicators (KPIs) are being used to measure the success for the service delivery. These are replicated in the model. An important step will be to consider the value of the KPIs under the current or alternate service models.

5.4.6 Conclusion

Use of the software-based model enables parameters to be varied on the supply side, generating insights on cause and effect and insights on the connections between different elements of the service system. The model allows for alternate strategies to be tested with potential deficiencies to be identified in a dynamic simulation environment.

While the service modelling research does not directly address any of the Desert Services that Work research questions, it makes an important contribution to answering each of them by providing an understanding of the supply side of service delivery to settlements. It does so by providing an analysis of the policy environment and governance structures, some analysis of the funding for specific programs, and an assessment of the performance and evaluation process. It also provides a description of a range of services and service delivery models and a typology of service delivery models for analysis.

Further development of the model could provide detailed analysis of the service delivery process, allowing bottlenecks to be identified and an examination of trade-offs to be undertaken. The software-based model developed through the research is available from DKCRC.

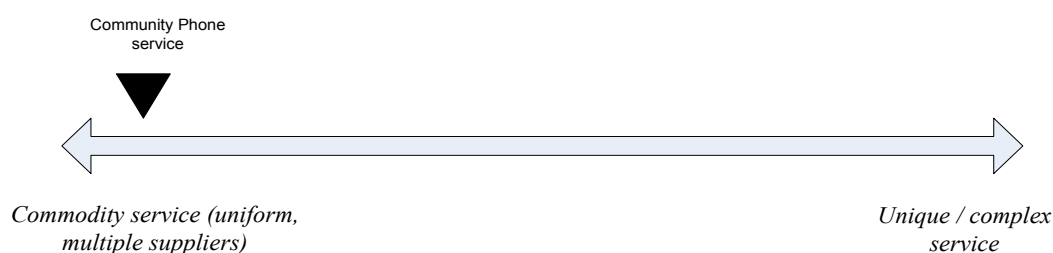
5.5 The Community Phones Project

The Community Phones Project (CPP)³ was developed by CAT as a response to concerns frequently expressed by Aboriginal community members in consultations with CAT staff about the limitations of their phone services. Public phones were frequently out of order, and where people had access to home phones or even satellite phones in some cases, the owners of these were often faced with extremely large bills due to indiscriminate use of the phone by their visitors. There were a number of practical shortcomings in the Telstra coin payphone, namely its high implementation cost, vulnerability to coin jams and vandalism, and its high maintenance complexity and cost in the remote community context. Some of these shortcomings, and particularly the high maintenance cost, had been inhibiting factors in Telstra’s delivery of the USO payphone service. Given the lack of other communications alternatives, safety considerations and the importance of effective communications to people’s livelihoods, CAT decided to develop a robust telephone for remote communities.

For the purposes of the research, Andrew Crouch evaluated the experience of the CPP against the research questions for Desert Services that Work. He applied a tool based on a scale to analyse distinguishing features of the Community Phone service in terms of a number of generalised service characteristics. The ‘service’ being considered is the total service, not simply the Community Phone itself. There is some overlap between these features, as for example between community engagement and project resourcing.

³ This section draws heavily on Crouch 2009

5.5.1 Nature of the service



The service being offered to customers is a phone call transaction. Seen from that viewpoint as distinct from the technical complexities of service delivery and market remoteness, Community Phone and other public telephone services are commodity services, given the maturity and uniformity of the product (the telephone call) and the characteristic that the same product can be sourced from multiple providers. In environments where a similar commodity is being offered by other means such as mobile phone networks, the two services are competing with each other.



Telecommunications services can also be ranged horizontally along a continuum of complexity. The Community Phone service would be regarded as a basic service, given its relative simplicity of use and function compared with other more recently developed complex services such as web browsing, which embrace a wide variety of media, speed, content, security and filtering, and response time features.

5.5.2 Community engagement in planning, implementation and ongoing operation



Members of the recipient communities were engaged in:

- making the initial application for service
- selecting an appropriate location for the phone
- arranging local access to a supply of phone cards
- undertaking training for first-level maintenance of the phone (for a limited number of individuals).

For the majority of community members the overall degree of involvement at project level has only been, and only needed to be, minor. In terms of the possible effect engagement in the process may have had on usage and performance of the service, the only realistic comparison that can be made is with public payphones in communities that have both types of phone. Surveys of residents in two such communities (Pmara Jutunta and Santa Teresa in the NT) in mid-2007 (Crouch 2007) indicated that more respondents had used a payphone (84%) than had used a Community Phone (56%), but this

could be attributable to the fact that Community Phones had only been in place for about a year, while payphones had been in place much longer. Other than that, there is no general evidence to suggest that Community Phones are used more or less than payphones in locations where both are similarly accessible, and reliability performance for both phone types has been similar to date.

5.5.3 Funding model



Telecommunications network infrastructure in remote areas has historically been heavily subsidised. Public support for these subsidies continues to be strong, as evidenced by the findings of the 2008 Regional Telecommunications Review, which recommended a substantial expansion to the USO framework to embrace mobile and broadband services on equity grounds (Glasson 2008). The extent to which services are market funded (i.e. paid for by the user) is the proportion of total costs that is recouped through revenue from the sale of those services.

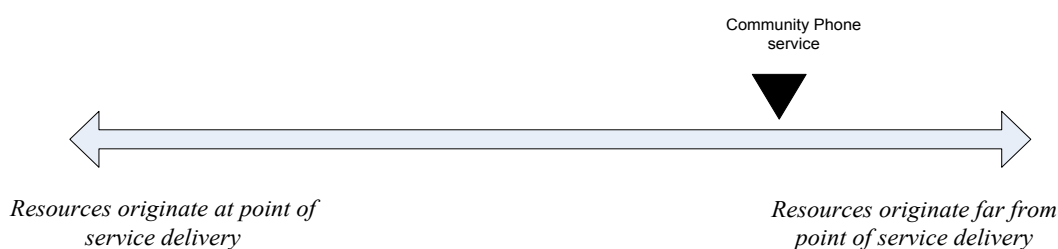
5.5.4 Subsidy mechanism



Remote telecommunications services in general are subsidised by a mix of USO and targeted funding mechanisms. The USO is applied to public payphones and the Standard Telephone Service, these being the basic telephone services defined by legislation and regulation that must be 'reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business' (Australian Government 1997, S3). Other services such as extensions to terrestrial mobile networks in areas where improved coverage is deemed necessary but not commercially viable are subsidised by Government funded targeted programs.

Community Phones have been supported to date through targeted Federal funding. While a recommendation was made to the Government by the consultant who evaluated the Community Phones extended trial (Horsley 2007) that Community Phones should be moved into the ambit of the USO payphone funding scheme, this has not occurred.

5.5.5 Origin of project resources (equipment, material, services)



The majority of resources provided for the Community Phone service originate at a considerable distance from the community locations where they are used. Maintenance services are sourced more from local providers, but nevertheless not often from within the communities themselves.

Our analysis of the Community Phones Project has led to insights on the key parameters around which a particular service for people living in remote settlements can be analysed. A telephone is a unique service in the sense that the technology is well-established, the degree to which local people might expected to be involved in design and delivery is limited and its function is well-defined (to talk to other people). These aspects taken as given, the service can then be analysed against other criteria, among which sustainability of the service is all-important. This focuses our attention on the funding and subsidies required.

This analytical path is actually well-trodden – think of questions about the future of public telephones during a period of rapid growth of private mobile phones and dramatic reduction in their use. The issue of funding and subsidy models for payphones has come under scrutiny as average revenue per phone has fallen.

6. Conceptual and analytical tools

6.1 Demand-responsive services

DKCRC has found that the principles of demand-responsive services are valuable in examining the role of services in relation to local capacity. Demand-responsive services ensure that the capacity of a community to use a service for their particular needs is central to planning and investment. The approach emerged from the Water Decade of the 1990s and has been adopted by several international agencies. In our context, the concept gives stronger practical meaning to improved access to services.

The point of demand-responsive services, as we have seen in our research in locations in the Northern Territory such as Lajamanu and Ali Curung, is that community members make choices in a service environment that is facilitated by government and in which local capacity and objectives take precedence over centrally determined service standards.

6.2 The demand–supply dynamic

Although imperfect as a means of describing the relationship between Aboriginal people as users of services and entities that are responsible for service delivery, we have found the simple model of demand and supply to be valuable in thinking about the issues that lead to shortcomings in services.

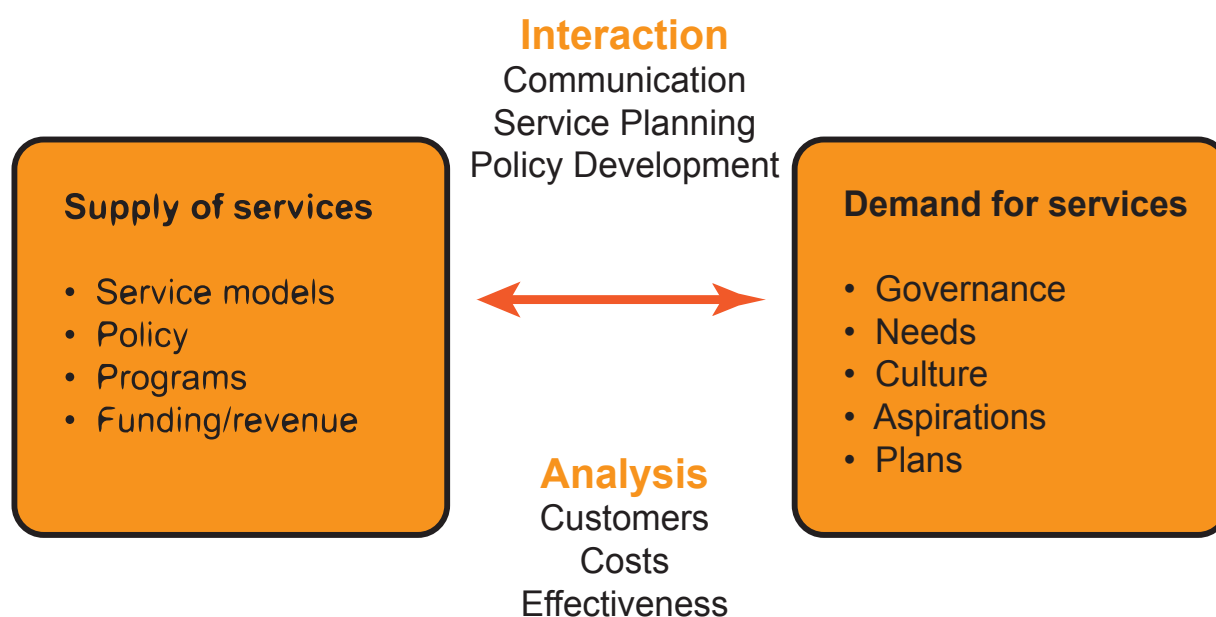


Figure 6.1: The demand–supply dynamic in services

6.3 Service models

A service model is an arrangement by which a service provider enables users to gain access to a service or set of services. Service models either evolve over time through the interplay of the factors above or they are determined by the way in which a service is designed and established by providers. As a result, a large number of service models exist across remote Australia. Taken as a whole, they present a complex and sometimes fragmented set of arrangements.

Figure 6.2 provides a topological abstract of service delivery. In this figure, the yellow arrow depicts the service provision and the red is the funding stream. The blue triangles are the service providers.

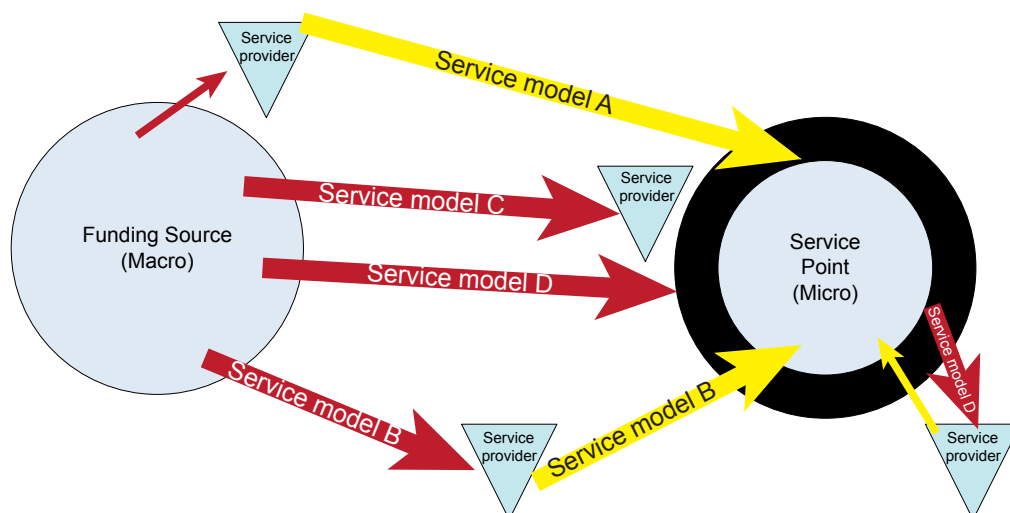


Figure 6.2: The service delivery process

For the purpose of abstracting, we considered the following four process models.

- Service model A shows a model where the service provider is remote from the service point but close to the funding source.
- In service model B the service provider is depicted as remote from the service point and the funding source.
- In service model C the service provider is close to or internal to the service point and distant from the funding source.
- In service Model D the funding is directly provided to the service point and a local service provider is contracted directly.

In considering the use of remoteness in the above descriptions, the distance could be administrative distance, geographical, cultural or facilitative.

6.4 Recognition space

In our research on housing reform in the Northern Territory, Porter (2009) adapted Taylor's (2008) use of Mantziaris and Martin's 'recognition space' to illustrate how engagement in this space could create a hybrid housing model for NT remote Aboriginal communities. Adopting this working construct does not presume that the 'recognition space' lies between isolated and untainted domains. Rather, these constructed domains are illustrative and the result of exposure, transformation and mutual engagement with each other and other influences (Smith 2008, pp. 154–158). In this example the 'recognition space' can be viewed as representing the area where there is constant mediation between customary practices, active involvement in elements of mainstream society and economy, and the expectations of the state.

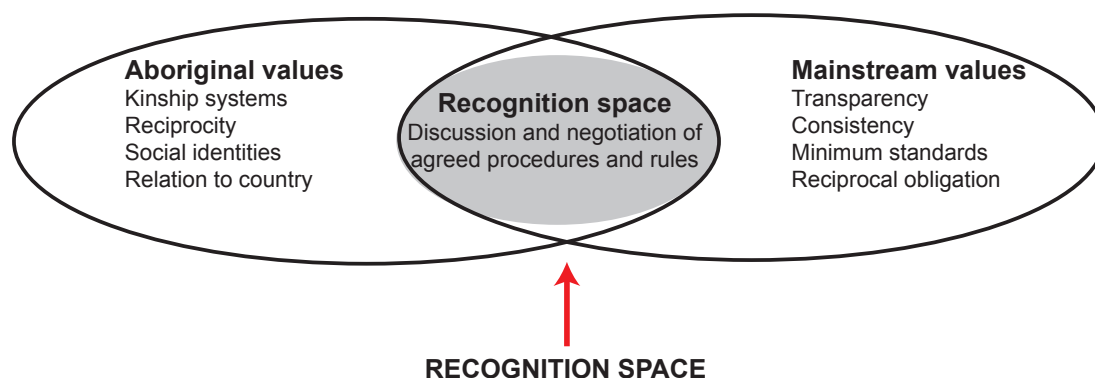


Figure 6.3: The recognition space for demand responsiveness in housing

The mainstreaming ‘values’ of consistent level of service, minimum standards, transparency in decision making on the government side and reciprocal obligation on the customer/demand side is captured in one sphere of Figure 6.3. In the other sphere are the ‘values’ of Aboriginal culture that include, for example, social identities, kinship systems, high levels of reciprocal obligation, and a holistic understanding of the relationship between land and people. The area of intersect is the ‘recognition space’ and represents the extent to which Territory Housing and Aboriginal communities are able to discuss, negotiate and agree on rules and procedures, that is, the extent to which they are able and willing to recognise the existence and validity of each other’s priorities and find solutions that give housing services meaning for both partners.

6.5 Complex adaptive systems

As Chapman has described, ‘a principal feature of a complex adaptive system is its ability to adapt – its ability to survive significant changes in its environment through changes in behaviour and internal processes. Adaptation is the process that enables this system to maintain its integrity’ (Chapman 2004, p. 52). Underlying this latent ability to withstand external forces and to be resilient in the face of external forces are the networks of relationships, established processes and structures that are present in any organisational system.

Given that government-led services to small remote communities of Aboriginal people have existed in a broadly consistent form for forty years, the notion of established processes being a basis for a complex adaptive system is a valid one in our context. This is particularly the case in an environment where personal relationships and cultural protocols are so important.

As Chapman has pointed out, complex adaptive-system thinking challenges the assumption that the relationship between cause and effect is a linear one. Instead, ‘the dominant mode is non-linear ... Apparently small changes within a complex system can cause, through feedback and effects multiplying rather than just adding, very large changes elsewhere in the system’ (Chapman 2004, p. 54). In the context of remote Australia, the challenges of making long-term policy goals relevant to the often messy business of bringing together resources in an effective way itself calls for a comprehensive understanding of the many human, behavioural, political and economic factors that are involved. And each of these is specific to a particular location (Huigen & Fisher 2010).

For the purposes of analysing desert services, considering complex adaptive systems is useful in three ways. First, it frames performance in terms of a more complicated set of results than a single measureable policy target. Outcomes from effective services may be felt locally as improvements within the system, such as improved participation or greater community safety and security. Recent research by Relationships Australia has sought to highlight the many benefits of family mediation that are unrecognised by single performance targets (Ross et al. 2010).

Second, the theory of complex adaptive systems leads us away from simplistic cause–effect analyses of services. Allocating more resources or changing service delivery criteria at one end of the service system does not necessarily lead to changes to access or quality for users at the other end. Research in Desert Services that Work has consistently pointed to the complexity of cause and effect across the multiple interfaces between actors in a service system.

Third, achieving improvements to the effectiveness of desert services requires a broader set of approaches, tools and techniques than those specific to the particular service. For example, better technical skills applied to remote energy systems is only one contributor to the effectiveness of that service. On the supply side, communication, community engagement, planning, management and community development knowledge and techniques are all valuable.

7. Responses to research questions

7.1 Research questions

The project design for Desert Services that Work directs the research towards five research questions. After a review of the first eighteen months of work, in November 2007 the Steering Group revised and endorsed the following five research questions as a means to guide the project:

1. What are characteristics of the interplay between demand and supply of services, according to the perceptions of consumers and service providers engaged at the local interface?
2. What are the conditions that permit successful practice to develop between consumers and service providers?
3. At what scales of governance should different service delivery functions be assigned to optimise both demand and supply based criteria?
4. What are the service type and delivery style priorities of consumers within a specified budget framework, and what is their capacity to participate and willingness to contribute to services?
5. What are the critical issues and strategies to improve the service system, including the strengths and weaknesses of different technology and governance options?

The Steering Group added the following directions:

- Adopt a more sophisticated engagement with supply chain in government, including intergovernmental dynamics between the Australian and State/Territory governments.
- Limit the scope to two categories of services – housing and governance.
- Respond to the local government reform and the Australian Government's 'intervention', as this unfolds across the research sites.
- Seek out research sites where groups have own-source income, through mining royalties or private commercial enterprises.
- Adopt a strategic communications approach to maximise uptake of research results by government.
- Satisfactorily complete research questions 1 to 4 before embarking on research question 5.
- Incorporate secondary data sources from government, especially those evaluating and critiquing its own practice.

In essence, the research described in this report was developed to test the assumption that services that are responsive to user demand will be more effective as they are better aligned with user needs and behaviours. It aims to investigate whether and in what way service users will choose to participate in decision making about services. The research explores questions of subsidiarity, which services are best coordinated and delivered from a central or regional location and which are more suitable for local management, with varying degrees of engagement with and contribution by the service users. The project aims to identify the factors that contribute to hold back the demand responsiveness of services to remote settlements of Aboriginal people. It goes on to recommend approaches to addressing issues identified through the research.

7.2 Characteristics of the interplay between demand and supply of services

Research Question No. 1 asks ‘What are characteristics of the interplay between demand and supply of services, according to the perceptions of consumers and service providers engaged at the local interface?’

We consistently discovered across all the research sites that interactions between agencies or companies providing services to remote communities and local residents were hampered by inadequate communication and poor understanding. This observation was especially vivid in the Northern Territory as a series of reforms were introduced by Federal and Territory Governments during the period that researchers were working in Ali Curung, Lajamanu and with the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre. Local government reform, Shared Responsibility Agreements, the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program and the Northern Territory Emergency Response all demonstrated the problems inherent in outsiders achieving the level of engagement with Aboriginal people that is required for the changes to be implemented successfully.

In Ali Curung and Lajamanu, better consultation practices were repeatedly identified by demand-side interviewees as an important need. While community consultations by Territory Housing and others did occur across the period of the research, there was much dissatisfaction expressed by community residents about how it occurred and who was spoken with. It is apparent that the issue hinges around expectations of residents that consultation should involve the building of mutual understanding and should facilitate a process of negotiation and agreement in relation to housing reforms. As the nature of the reforms to housing, tenancy management and asset maintenance have been largely pre-determined, the consultations that did occur could be no more than information-giving sessions. In this sense, local people felt that the process of consultation was weak at best and disingenuous at worst.

While there may be significant costs associated with undertaking more nuanced consultations and putting forward at least some aspects of the proposed reforms on the negotiation table, it is likely that significant cost benefits were foregone in the process and approach that government used. For example, house swapping due to sorry business occurs frequently and is largely self-managed by residents with deference to appropriate cultural norms and decision-making structures. Under the new public housing tenancy rules, house swapping for any reason is explicitly banned. It is likely that the new rules will be ignored by residents, and, if enforced, result in vacant houses at risk of vandalism, increased overcrowding in other housing stock and/or increased homelessness. If this issue had been taken into negotiation with appropriate people in the community tasked with the authority to negotiate such decisions, rules and processes agreeable to both parties may have been able to be established. This would have further facilitated a degree of commitment to and ownership of housing reform at the community level.

Our response to this research question is therefore overwhelmingly influenced by the gap that exists between service users and service providers (policy makers, programs, discrete services) in relation to the range of services that we examined. In housing tenancy and asset management in the Northern Territory there is a significant difference between the reality of tenancy and asset management at the local level and the proposed changes towards a public housing model, improved housing stock, normalised tenancy rules and new asset management responsibilities. These changes are, in effect, developed by supply-side agencies on to which consultation with residents is grafted over time. Research has shown that the complexity of the changes planned requires large lead times for implementation. As a result, business has continued as usual, albeit with voids and cracks appearing as reforms to the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), the move to Shires, and the closure of local housing organisations created confusion over tenancy management processes and repairs and maintenance. This has led to a perceived reduction in service provision as expressed by a

number of householders interviewed and in the rate of turnover of relevant staff on communities, as well as building frustration as anticipated changes to housing and tenancy management (refurbishments, new houses, new rules) are delayed. There are clear capacity issues at all levels of government to take forward housing development and tenancy reform as centralised and top-down coordination of service provision and community consultations roll-out, a point to which we return later in this section.

Also in the Northern Territory, we observed that the proposed changes to housing are inextricably tied to a suite of overarching Aboriginal affairs policy agendas such as welfare reform, economic participation and development, land tenure reform and ‘normalisation’ of services. These agendas are not necessarily the agendas of local people and agencies who are more likely to see more housing or improved housing and better local services as the core issue. Thus, effective engagement with community residents and householders, let alone achieving some local buy-in or ‘ownership’ of the reform process, is compromised by the tension and conflict between the perceived issues and agendas of supply- and demand-side actors.

For example, where householders may see local management of housing issues and some Aboriginal governance as critical to securing improved services that meet the needs of tenants, government agencies may place the promotion of social change through housing provision and services as a high priority. Thus, service provision around housing in Aboriginal settlements is focused on shaping the nature of the service recipient to fit the nature of the service to be supplied, rather than negotiating effective services responses to local priorities and local capacities to participate and contribute.

In some locations that were the subject of our research, there is almost no engagement between the demand and supply sides of services. The reasons often boil down to an absence of representation of local people in governance arrangements for services. We have particularly observed this problem in communities where Martu people live, being settlements in the East Pilbara and Western Desert regions of Western Australia, and where mining operations are also significant within the economy of the area. Martu people have yet to reap substantial benefit from mining interests on the Native Title land. The intent of BHP Billiton, which does not correlate to Native Title obligations, is thus of particular interest. BHP is effectively a service provider, whether in relation to training provision or by directly or indirectly providing services (McGrath et al. 2010).

The following points draw heavily on the work of Natalie McGrath, Martin Anda and Mark Moran (McGrath et al. 2010), whose research showed that, within the Western Desert, ‘there exist many supply-side boundaries which represent the roles and responsibility of Government agencies and BHP Billiton, as the two main organisations that provide services. Each organisation has its own hierarchy, the members of which have roles and responsibilities bounded by broader and diverse spans of geographical territory. Service delivery in the Western Desert thus operates as a complex network of different government, non-government and mining organisations existing at varying scales, none of whose geographical boundaries coincide or whose roles and responsibilities easily coordinate. The partnerships that BHP Billiton coordinates are a mechanism of cutting across this inter-organisational complexity but also in turn add to the institutional complexity that exists’ (McGrath et al. 2010).

They observed that ‘a number of Martu boundaries exist within the population on the “demand” side of services. These include language group and “country” origin, family, age (whether or not an individual is an elder), gender and the primary settlement at which an individual is seen to be based. Many of the boundaries discussed here primarily relate to identity and were constructed through participatory observation and are referred to here for the purpose of emphasising issues of complexity. In no way are these claimed to be a definitive account of Martu representations of themselves, and it is likely that there exist other boundaries within the Martu world as seen by Martu people’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 8).

Further observations are that ‘another boundary which further compounds complexity and supports the argument here is whether an individual is identified as Martu or belongs to another Aboriginal group. Mining sector, government and non-government programs are often targeted either at Aboriginal people or at Martu people; both of these categories render invisible the differences that exist within these categorised groups or the hybridity that may exist between them. Often programs are labelled as Aboriginal but target Martu people only, or on the other hand, target the generic ‘other’ Aboriginal people and do not attract Martu participants. Aboriginal people from elsewhere in Australia working for service organisations are often expected to naturally form relationships and/or represent Martu people’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 9).

The complexity of Martu identity is not recognised by service providers. ‘The concept of community is often used to represent Martu identity in communication between service providers. However, what boundaries are determined by the use of the term Martu community in any one conversation between service providers is largely unclear. Additionally it has been observed by the authors that any one service provider will use the term community inter-changeably to imply varying boundaries around the Martu population and Martu settlements. At times service providers include all Martu people within the Western Desert region when discussing the ‘Martu community’. Alternatively, only the Martu in Newman are included, which may imply either Martu people living in Parnpajinya (a Martu settlement on the edge of Newman) or may include both the Martu people living in Parnpajinya and Newman which in both cases may at any one time also include people visiting from other Martu communities. The gaze of service providers for Martu people is generally focused upon Martu people in Newman/ Parnpajinya possibly as a result of Newman acting as the office base for service providers. It has been observed that service providers (perhaps unconsciously) change the boundaries around the term community depending upon the requirements of the task at hand or the focus of the conversation’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 9).

‘As a result, Martu identity in the delivery of services is non-existent. The lived reality of Martu people does not neatly fall within geographical boundaries that service organisations prefer and define as ‘communities’ but instead involves a degree of fluidity where Martu people ‘belong’ and/or are connected strongly to a number of geographies across households and settlements, and appear most primarily as a kin-based society. Changes and fluidity across time, space and social-group categories within the Martu population unsettles policy and program delivery styles based upon a settlement approach only’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 10).

Resonating with observations made in other research sites, research with Martu people illustrated that they often show limited knowledge and understanding of the internal structures and processes of the various organisations that interact with them. This ‘institutional landscape... and the many supply-side boundaries that exist’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 10) is rarely considered by Martu people as a complex set of government and non-government organisations, departments and divisions. ‘The extent of this limited understanding is potentially more acute within the Western Desert when compared to other Australian contexts, because of the historically limited cross-cultural contact. Thus a sharp boundary between service providers and Martu people is maintained by limited understanding by Martu people about service providers and vice versa’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 11).

The understanding developed through our research that multiple rather than a single interface exist between demand and supply in desert services is reinforced by the work with Martu people. The majority of service providers in the area ‘expressed a desire to engage Martu people that represent the Martu domain. Many organisations are seeking to establish a single Martu interface in which to engage. It is generally the case that a few individuals identified by service providers, mostly based in Newman, are asked to attend meetings and speak for Martu people, and at times for all Aboriginal people. These individuals are often expected to act in an unpaid capacity for their common good of their ‘community’; whether this implies Parnpajinya, Newman and Parnpajinya or includes all Martu communities across

the Western Desert is never clear. This form of consultation never allows for the time necessary to allow such individuals to facilitate discussion amongst Martu people, nor does it recognise the potential cultural inappropriateness of one Martu representative being able to speak for all Martu people, however this is defined' (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 11). In the context of this research question on the interactions between supply and demand, we can see that the interaction between people on the supply and demand side is compromised from the outset.

In other settings, engagement is inconsistent due to the high mobility of local people and the changing staff within service providers. Alternatively, efforts to resolve a service issue, such as access to good water in Dajarra, western Queensland, have involved much discussion but little tangible change. A case in point comes from the experience of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) by residents of the Tjuwanpa outstations, who describe the communication difficulties between residents and staff of agencies implementing measures introduced through the NTER. This included a new vocabulary of words that accompanied the Intervention: 'people heard that jobs would be "*normalised*" and "*mainstreamed*", there would be "*compulsory acquisition*" of Aboriginal land; people would be "*transitioned*" off CDEP, "*income management*" would replace CDEP wages, and Centrelink benefits would be quarantined' (Kennedy 2009, p. 5).

The interplay between supply and demand in the early phase of the PY Ku Remote Transactions Centre Program has been characterised by a high level of community support for a new way of gaining access to services. Although a long gestation period was involved, followed by delays in implementation, this had the effect of building anticipation in the six communities where the centres were opened. In fact, many local people remembered the first meeting on the subject in 2003 and their expectations were that PY Ku would enable them to pay for driving licences, conduct banking and use the internet without having to travel all the way to Alice Springs. Although the first suite of services available was disappointing for some, the model itself was quickly shown to have potential, and usage levels during the first phase studied through our research was high.

A point made repeatedly in this report is that the leading role that Anangu organisations, PY Media, and Anangu staff played in the delivery of the service, was critical in making the interplay between demand and supply as positive an experience as possible. The delayed implementation allowed for more staff training to be carried out. By the time our evaluation was completed, the centres had started to take on a broader role as a source of information for local people and other services.

A frequent shortcoming is miscommunication and misunderstanding between service users and service providers about the scope and nature of services, the choices available and the needs and demand at the local level. A symptom of these problems is that service providers, finding engagement with local people to be difficult, tend to operate firmly on the supply side of the equation, delivering a service that they feel they are being paid to provide. There are few incentives to do otherwise and limited guidance or documented practice that would encourage service agencies to engage with service users in an active and sophisticated way. This problem, coupled with the shortage of good evaluative data from existing programs, leads to weaknesses in design and development of services. Beyond technical improvements, real change in a way that is felt positively by service users is limited.

A case in point is Dajarra, when people feel marginalised and ignored, with some residents angered by the failure to secure access to a potable water supply. Having endured the problems with water for decades, and after workshops, petitions and press releases, Dajarra people hold the Shire Council responsible for the lack of action. This is part of more widespread discontent in the Aboriginal population of Dajarra at the general level of service provided by Cloncurry Shire Council.

Specifically, Dajarra residents consider that one local full-time employee on the Council staff is inadequate to meet the needs of the town. Early survey work for our research in Dajarra recorded local opinions on the Council and levels of municipal service:

Interactions between Dajarra and Cloncurry Shire Council (CSC) would be improved through the establishment of a Dajarra based CSC workforce that is drawn from the Dajarra population. Elsewhere in the region there are significant examples of the capacity of Indigenous people to contribute to local government services and main roads construction and maintenance (e.g. Boulia, Bedourie and Camooweal). There are strong feelings in Dajarra that CSC should employ more Dajarra people as workers in order to improve the council's work in Dajarra (such as improving the amenity of the town). Furthermore, it was stated that CSC should employ people on full wages to do these things instead of the current situation whereby CDEP crews are doing work that is the responsibility of local government.

(Long 2008, p. 10)

A new mayor was elected to the Cloncurry Shire Council at the local government elections in 2008. After his election, the mayor visited Dajarra to meet with residents in the Jimberella hall to discuss local concerns. Dajarra residents saw this as a positive start to his term, given the absence of visits by the previous mayor (over two terms).

The inability of the Council to retrieve a consultant's report on groundwater at Dajarra (PPK 2001) suggested capacity constraints for a municipal administration in a shire of this scale and population – 3158 in the 2006 census (ABS 2009). Staff turnover at the municipal level would also result in loss of corporate memory of shire services. Skilled technical positions, such as shire engineer, were difficult to retain given the distance from the coast and capital cities, municipal budgets and a relatively long period of high demand for engineering and construction professions (driven by mining and construction). The capacity to attract and retain skilled staff is a problem affecting remote settlements in regional Queensland, and particular leading to unpredictability in desert regions (Stafford Smith 2008, p. 9). This turnover of staff, combined with the relatively short political cycle, appears to have affected the resolution of the Dajarra water problem.

However, despite a picture of service interactions that we have built up and which is often bleak, more positive experiences were also identified through the research and these help to bring into focus the problems described above. For example, in western Queensland the Myuma Group has accomplished a very effective process of integration of Aboriginal service provision and Aboriginal economic enterprise activity. The characteristics of the Myuma model of operation includes the following components:

1. Attracting a large-scale contract with government or private enterprise that can be fulfilled with largely Aboriginal labour.
2. Hosting the Aboriginal workers on-site with accommodation, meals and a social and service environment that is culturally appropriate, so that the employees are reasonably comfortable.
3. Providing accessible training courses to the labour pool relevant to the work experience, so there is added value for the employees and so that the labour force acquires ongoing diverse skill sets.
4. Identifying the consumer needs of the workforce and inviting suppliers to visit the Work Camp at various times to fulfil some of those needs, either by educating the employee-consumer about the availability of the service, or by delivering the service in-situ at the Camp.
5. Attracting more enterprise and training contracts to achieve a stable continuity of employment, training and hence accompanying ongoing service provision. In implementing this process the Myuma Group has also been able to generate identifiable good practice achievements in its training services.

Myuma's approach represents a departure from the conventional desert services arrangement where non-Aboriginal people are predominantly involved in delivering services and Aboriginal people are users and consumers of those services. In the Myuma case, Aboriginal people undertake (or at least control) both sides of the equation, establishing a mode of access to services that is grounded in the region and responsive to local needs and aspirations.

A specific use of Myuma profits is the purchase of modest gifts (food, petrol, clothes, cigarettes) to maintain these Aboriginal relationships in a ‘blackfeller way’. A technological characteristic of this communication network has been the increased reliance on mobile phones by bush people with low literacy skills over the last ten years, including the latest models for remote usage. Video conferencing has not yet been introduced to the Dugalunji Camp but it is anticipated in the near future. These features generally enhance the Aboriginal preference for a direct face-to-face form (and principle) of service delivery.

In summary, in our response to the research question on the interplay between the demand and supply of services there are commonalities of the experiences of people in all the research sites that we summarise as:

1. A significant **mismatch between supply-side activities and demand-side realities**. This promises continuing discordance between government program implementation and residents of remote Aboriginal settlements. At one level, this relates to the boundaries between the separate worlds of government and Aboriginal people, where values and priorities are different, but it more fundamentally reflects an inability of people to operate, or at least to perceive, cross-culturally.
2. Even where service providers and service users want the same result, the fact that they are starting from quite different analyses of the issues means that a **gap in understanding** appears in the development of services that is hard to bridge. For example, where policy agendas in housing focus on land tenure reform and economic development, the connection with the immediate concerns of residents for more and better housing will not be apparent to them.
3. **Discontinuity of planning and process**, such as the fragmented nature of evaluations, reports, recommendations and inadequate solutions to the water problems in Dajarra. Service provision is also confounded and delayed by the need to pursue multiple agendas simultaneously and across tiered, layered and bulky government departments.
4. A tendency of individuals and groups to behave as if following **pre-determined stereotyped roles** within the service system. We observed the passivity and cynicism of local residents faced with shortcomings in services, the earnest frustration of service agencies unable to find the right people to talk with, the arm-waving promises of local politicians and so on. The roles that people played were amplified by the seemingly intractable nature of the problems they face in delivering and gaining access to services.
5. An **over-reliance on individuals** with particular skills and knowledge to make the system operate better than it would otherwise. In the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, the presence of long-term staff in key positions enabled very effective interpretation of policy changes at State and Federal level to gain the best value for local services, but also established a dependency on a small number of people. This is common in many remote organisations, for which a change of staff often presents the prospect of a complete sea change in the performance of services.

If people are to talk about services, negotiate arrangements, measure the results and understand how improvements can be made, then the term ‘engagement’ is the most appropriate one for us to use. Engagement means people connecting with each other in a meaningful way to achieve all these things. But the services sector is impoverished by the lack of any recognisable, structured and accountable means of achieving better engagement between the supply and demand sides of desert services. People know what good engagement looks and feels like, but the chances of good practice being developed in this area are left to chance, almost entirely dependent on the skills of individuals.

Despite widespread rhetoric around cross-cultural communication and understanding in remote Australia, achievements in this area lag far behind. Incentives for better engagement are lacking and so practice is often defined by what will suffice as a minimum standard, rather than aspirations to more meaningful dialogue across the divide between service providers and services users. While this remains the case, the goal of identifying effective practice, let alone scaling it up, will continue to be elusive.

7.3 Conditions permitting successful practice between consumers and service providers

Research Question 2 asked: ‘What are the conditions that permit successful practice to develop between consumers and service providers?’ It follows from our response to Research Question 1 that better practice comes about through improvements to the quality of interactions between service users and service providers. We recognise that the terminology of ‘providers’ and ‘users’ itself is problematic, implying polar opposites in the service dynamic, but we have used it in this report as the most clear description of the key actors in desert services.

We have identified ten conditions that permit successful practice, which we have called the principles of effective services in desert Australia.

Principle 1: Quality and adequacy of supply

Whether for telephones, rubbish collection or the maintenance of water bores, service providers set out to deliver a high quality service that meets the needs of users. There are many reasons why the supply of services often falls short of these aims. They include the challenges of recruiting and retaining suitable staff, the physical demands of the desert environment on equipment and materials, difficulties in communication, and poor access to knowledge and information.

A critical principle of service delivery is that the quality of the service meets a standard that is appropriate for the local context and that the supply is adequate for local needs. At the same time, as described in Principle 2, quality and adequacy of supply should also be adaptable to local conditions affecting demand. A standardised high-quality but high-cost service may be unaffordable and therefore inaccessible to people wishing to use it.

Principle 2: Supply of service is adaptable to local conditions affecting demand

It may be cost-effective for service providers to deliver standardised services, but often local circumstances call for a more adaptable and flexible approach. For example, where people are committed to living in a certain place and accept that its natural resources may be limited, then for providers to insist on urban water or energy standards may ultimately lead to unsustainable costs of living for remote area residents.

This principle calls for an informed understanding of the aspirations of local people and responsiveness to local conditions.

Principle 3: Clear decision points

It is simplistic to argue that more localised decision making produces better results. After all, local people may not have the specialised knowledge and skills to make decisions. Yet, there is plenty of evidence from our research in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, in particular, that local organisations charged with service delivery often find themselves at the sharp end of a long supply chain over which they have little influence. When policy changes centrally (meaning at State, Territory or Federal level), local staff interpret and explain the changes to their customers. Some agency staff have described themselves as experiencing waves of reform coming one after the other.

The principle here is about service systems incorporating well-defined decision points that are relevant for the kind of service being planned. For example, the location of a payphone may be an important decision in which local people need to be involved, but the actual decisions around the technical functioning of that service is a central rather than local matter. By contrast, the development of a ranger service will require a high level of local discussion and a series of decision points mapped out in advance.

Principle 4: Involvement of trusted outsiders and insiders

Where services are provided in English and with a heavy sprinkling of acronyms, technical jargon and official terms, desert dwellers often rely on outsiders to help interpret what is going on. We have seen through studies in Martu country in Western Australia and in western Queensland that local organisations can help to bridge the gap (or span the boundary) between service providers and Aboriginal people. This also applies to insiders too. In the case of the PY Ku Remote Transaction Centre Program, the employment of local Anangu people as staff has encouraged use of the service and enabled users to count on support from people who understand their perspective and their priorities.

Principle 5: Quality of interpersonal relationships across a service network

In small desert communities, relationships are important. Time is needed to build rapport and understanding between people. It is no coincidence that services perceived to be effective are often those which have people with an ability to anticipate local concerns, manage misunderstandings and communicate clearly. The quality of the service becomes person-dependent rather than system-dependent. Fostering good relationships and putting the resources into maintaining them is critical to effective services.

For Myuma, an inclusive (rather than exclusive) approach to spreading the enterprise benefits created by a small extended family group is critical. This enables a regional bloc of multiple language groups and other benefactors in the wider community to be stakeholders in the Myuma Group, which can then project itself as a benefactor for the regional Aboriginal population (not simply as a nepotistic family-based firm), an image that is essential to attract strong government support and local legitimacy among the regional population. The Myuma case study demonstrates how service delivery can be linked to, and integrated with, economic enterprises to provide a more holistic approach to sustainable communities, one that combines economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainabilities. Part of the Myuma vision is to progressively interlink with the Camooweal township so that the benefits can be spread more into the town and ultimately raise its sustainability as well.

Principle 6: Form of engagement between service providers and users is determined by function

The term engagement is used here to describe the way in which providers and users of services communicate, negotiate and cooperate to ensure best outcomes. Our research in different locations in desert Australia is producing insights into the form of engagement in different situations and the influences on it.

We are observing that different forms of engagement suit different situations. Effective engagement is determined by the scope and nature of services. In examples such as housing maintenance, ongoing negotiation with residents about the maintenance regime is appropriate. In others, such as access to energy services, long-term agreements may be more suitable to local circumstances (Bushlight 2006).

In the delivery of the services at the Myuma service setting, Aboriginal leaders have chosen when to engage in particular issues of service delivery and act as brokers or facilitators at the Dugalunji Camp. This form of engagement is viewed as being essential to obtain sustainable outputs from service delivery. The level and depth of engagement varies with the particular service. The brokerage also involves making choices in the markets of Mt Isa, Townsville (or Brisbane at times) of the best service or supplier in the interests of the Myuma workforce. This assumes that the individual customer (the Myuma worker or trainee), particularly one with little experience of Western service settings, does not always know what services might be the best for their own needs. Nevertheless, the combination of Aboriginal leaders and mentors shaping the nature and design of service delivery and the use of the Dugalunji service delivery setting results in a significant level of consumer satisfaction such that there is a strong retention of staff and successful completion rates by trainees.

Given the recent history of turmoil over governance arrangements and service responsibilities on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, it is perhaps not surprising that our research received strong responses on the question of conditions for successful practice to develop. For many local people, good practice comes from Government recognising local complexities, meeting their obligations and overcoming organisational ‘silos’ and dysfunction. But of course, blaming Government for everything makes use of a large and soft target. While there is no doubt, as we have observed elsewhere in this report, that shortcomings of government agencies have led to failings in service effectiveness, good communication and understanding have rarely been a feature of collaboration between successful governments and Anangu people.

At the level of the PY Ku program itself, the overwhelming positive feature is the attractiveness of the concept to local people, coupled with its so-far proven ability to meet their needs for access to a basic range of services. The potential for more services to be added to the mix is obvious. In turn, the key element of the service model that appears to contribute to successful practice is that trained Anangu people who occupy key customer service positions are frequently able to very quickly understand the needs of customers. The respect that users have for the buildings and infrastructure of PY Ku enhances their comfort with the service as a whole. It is also interesting to observe that the centres themselves may not be Aboriginal ‘service settings’ as defined elsewhere in this report, but they are locations that are conducive to Aboriginal people conducting a range of transactions, largely due to the presence of Anangu staff.

Principle 7: Stability in the policy environment

Users of services become accustomed to the way they are delivered. When the system changes, people have to become used to new arrangements and learn how to gain the most benefit from them. Efficiency is often lost and the faith of service users becomes stretched, especially when the reasons for the change are determined centrally and are not apparent to them.

The DKCRC research team has examined aspects of policy stability in its work at Ali Curung, where the reform of local government and the effects of the Northern Territory Emergency Response have led to a rapidly changing policy environment. The closure of the Law and Justice Program, which was widely perceived to be an effective service with strong community commitment behind it, is a good example of central policy change undermining confidence in services locally and is the subject of further commentary later in this paper. Conversely, the presence of mature local organisations and a low turnover of staff in key positions have enabled transitions from one policy to another to be managed effectively in other locations in which researchers are working, a signal of policy stability being overcome through clear local responses.

Principle 8: Service match to local needs and capacity

The concept of ‘demand-responsive’ services came from the experience of improved strategies around access to water during the nineties (Black 1998). Demand-responsive services ensure that the capacity of a remote community to use a service for their particular needs is central to planning and investment.

Our research on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands has shown how a long-term vision for a settlement and the region within which it is located enables the supply chain of services to be better designed and oriented to goals to which residents themselves make a commitment. In this context, a key principle is that service development and implementation views both sides of the supply–demand equation and avoids the pitfall of focussing only on better *delivery* of services as opposed to improved *access* to services for locally determined objectives.

In Ali Curung and Lajamanu, it was apparent that there may be a threshold of essential service provision needed before effective negotiations around rules, rights and responsibilities can be undertaken. At Ali Curung, where no new housing stock is to be built under SIHIP, and the refurbishment of existing

houses has been downgraded to three essential areas (from nine), the housing stock may not be up to the standard required for the implementation of the new Public Housing Tenancy Rules. Despite the promises, anticipation, fears and uncertainties (and monies spent) playing out over the past twelve months, life for residents in Ali Curung may not change very much. The timeliness of service provision and clarity about who, what, when and how are critical conditions for successful practice and are essential in averting the spread of disgruntled consumers. Also important is thoughtful consideration of what elements of service delivery, even when centrally administered as per housing reform, are able to be negotiated and renegotiated at the local level in order to involve participants and support local institutions for developing skills, capacity, leadership and community renewal.

Principle 9: A culture of evaluation leading to learning and corrective change

The experience of most people involved in services, either as providers or users, is that reviews and evaluations are usually an indication of an existing problem. They are commissioned by the funders of a program in order to justify changes or they may be a precursor to restructuring or reallocation of resources elsewhere. Evaluations tend to be set-piece affairs which imply predetermined roles of the service provider as defendant and evaluator as probing investigator. Given this policy framework for assessing service performance, is it little wonder that practice in evaluating services is backward. While occasional high-level reviews take place, such as the Performance Audit of Whole of Government Indigenous Service Delivery Arrangements (ANAO 2007), more nitty-gritty examinations of the impact of services and ways to improve them are almost entirely absent.

A vivid example of the problems inherent in much evaluation practice comes from the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI), which reviewed 68 studies of primary health care models in mental health during 2006. Only seven percent of this literature addressed consumer and patient health outcomes. Overwhelmingly, the focus was on the implementation of various models and the most common outcome measure was data on the process and, often, the satisfaction of providers (Christensen et al. 2006). For studies of service effectiveness to concentrate mainly on the perceptions of the people delivering them is negligent to say the least.

In a separate exercise, APHCRI reviewed almost 600 articles in newspapers, magazines, on radio programs and television on mental health, finding that the greatest emphasis was on budgets. ‘Winners all round in \$2bn spree’ from *The Age* on 31 May 2006 is typical of these (Christensen et al. 2006). Very few stories examined how the mental health funding might be spent and what the results of the services are intended to be. In our sector we see the same emphasis, with media coverage of the national feral camel management project launch also focusing on the total project budget rather than on what the project will do and who it will benefit. Recent coverage of housing reform in the NT was all about the dollars and said little about the rationale for the planning, consultation and design phase of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) described in the project documentation and in studies of the implementation. Public administration of services focuses on ‘tightening ever more restrictively procedures for accounting solely along the lines of the disbursement of public money’ (Sullivan 2009, p. 66). This comes at the expense of accountability arrangements that emphasise results, performance and improvement.

When evaluation practice emphasises compliance with supply-side requirements alone, a whole piece of the picture is overlooked. There is little assessment of achievements by and for users of services and the voices of service users are rarely heard. Effective service evaluation would enable the full picture to be painted, with pointers for improvement and lessons for future practice identified. And yet evaluation is too often seen as a mystical art that is threatening at best and disruptive at worst. It is something that funders do to us and a reason to put up defences. Standardised and simplified approaches to service evaluation that are established as part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation practice would open opportunities for replication that are currently stifled.

Therefore a change in thinking is needed in this area. Evaluations should not be seen as a ‘blame game’ but rather a tool for finding out what works and learning how best to improve delivery of services. The international development community, led by the World Bank and multilateral development agencies, is leading the way on this. The World Bank, for example, has established an evaluation unit that monitors and evaluates projects, with the main focus being to learn from the experience and apply the learnings for continuous improvement, thereby achieving greater development impact. The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and development organisations such as the Canadian International Development Agency, AusAID, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the United States Agency for International Development have also followed suit. Such emphasis on evaluations for improvement can play a critical role in bringing about a change in thinking on the role of evaluations to increase development effectiveness.

In this context, the commitment made in the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery signed by the Council of Australian Governments in December 2008 to an accountability principle that ‘programs and services should have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation’ (COAG 2009, p. C-4) is welcome. An important emphasis is on ‘evaluating programs and services from multiple perspectives including from the client, Aboriginal communities and government perspectives and incorporating lessons into future program and services design’, a focus of new programs being implemented in selected communities in 2010 (COAG 2009, p. C-4). Of course, the quality of these processes will depend on the quality of the engagement achieved with Aboriginal people, a subject discussed elsewhere in this report.

Principle 10: Suitable service setting

The Dajarra case study suggests that an appropriate setting, controlled by the consumer, encourages successful service interactions. Physical settings can be designed to accommodate culturally specific behaviours, but often ownership, personalisation and patterns of use determine the success of a place for interactions with outsiders. At the Jimberella Hall and offices, service interactions occur in a setting that is owned and controlled by the Aboriginal people of Dajarra. This well-designed office building attached to the Jimberella Hall is a focal point for agencies, contractors and consultants seeking to make contact with Dajarra people.

In the context of Myuma, our research shows how the *modus operandi* of the company involves the selective attraction of government and private sector service agencies in a way that meets the expectations of Aboriginal people of how the interaction should take place, its timing and location. This is exemplified through the concept of the Aboriginal ‘service setting’ which, according to Paul Memmott, can be defined as ‘controlled by Aboriginal people and is designed to be comfortable for Aboriginal consumers. This can be achieved through a combination of behavioural patterns and environmental and artefactual features. The environmental features are fixed, semi-fixed or loose fixtures being a combination of manufactured objects and structures (architecture, artefacts) and natural elements (landscaping). The combination of features and behavioural patterns, including setting controls, are designed to be relatively comfortable, predictable, secure and conducive for Aboriginal people to use. There is also a sense of identity with and even ownership of such a setting by Aboriginal people when the service is being delivered in an effective way’ (Memmott 2010, p. 41).

Finally, as has been described already in this report, the experience of the PY Ku Program has been that the presence of Aboriginal staff is the single most important ingredient in creating a service setting that is conducive to meeting the needs of Aboriginal users. As one Anangu worker explained:

It’s an Anangu space ... our Anangu idea and now we work here! ... we can train our people, educate them to use services well ... speak in language and people come and ask what they don’t know ... it’s an Anangu dream PY Ku ... and I’m proud to be part of it! (Tedmanson et al. 2011)

In this sense, the role of well-trained Anangu staff in providing both good customer service and technical support and information that is required by the customer – while doing so in a way that makes local people comfortable to use it – is critical.

7.4 Scales of governance at which service delivery functions are assigned

Research Question 3 asks: ‘At what scales of governance should different service delivery functions be assigned to optimise both demand and supply based criteria?’ This is one of the core debates within Aboriginal affairs and also features in much discourse on international development, being a touchstone for political and ideological differences on decentralisation and self-determination. The literature on these subjects is reviewed in Section 2 of this report.

It is simplistic to suggest that decentralising decision making to the most local level will inevitably lead to better results. For technical services, often the necessary skills and knowledge are not available locally. Our response to this question is shaped by two considerations:

1. what it would take to achieve the responsiveness to demand that will lead to more effective practice between consumers and service providers
2. the capacity of local people and institutions to contribute to the governance of services.

Work in each research location produced observations of relevance to these two considerations. In the Northern Territory, housing reforms, tenancy management, asset maintenance and the roll-out of new houses and upgrades under SIHIP are centrally administered from the Territory Government. The new local government bodies will be partnering with Territory Housing to deliver services, although the trend has been for these services to become increasingly centralised. Since the SIHIP review published in August (Australian Government 2009), the Australian Government is also now co-managing the SIHIP program with the NT Government.

Experience elsewhere in Australia has underscored the problems with centralised management of public housing stock and tenancies, including the spatial concentration of poverty and disadvantage and the community impact from that, the suite of social and economic participation disincentives that tend to co-locate with public housing tenancies, and the inability of large centralised government departments to respond flexibly and promptly to tenant concerns and issues, especially those beyond payment of rents.

There is no reason to believe that the experience in the Territory will differ from experience elsewhere, especially given that spatial concentrations of disadvantage already exist, local avenues and institutions that can support improved tenant participation have been dissolved or dissipated, and the inadequacies of centralised service administration are exacerbated by the conditions of remoteness. It may be judicious to retain ownership of housing stock centrally; however, governance of tenancies and repairs and maintenance may best occur locally, whereby response to need and local conditions is tailored and efficient.

While the delegation of service functions regionally and locally within the Northern Territory is being implemented, such as through voluntary Housing Reference Groups (with advisory functions only) and Shire contracts for housing maintenance, governance functions are not similarly being delegated. These may be critical if housing reforms are to effectively negotiate the interface, not only of demand and supply issues, but the reality of differing cultural norms and family living practices. If housing is seen as the amenity from which residents can access livelihood and wellbeing opportunities, not only is the amenity that is provided through the house (such as safety, food, hygiene) important, so too are the rights and responsibilities of tenants *and* service providers. While there has been great emphasis

on tenants' responsibilities and new rules being heralded, there has been minimal focus on the issue of service provider or government accountabilities to tenants. The evidence gathered in this research project suggests that the further removed governance and provision of essential household (especially those perceived as essential by residents) management and maintenance activities are from the locale of the stock and tenants, the less likely effective accountabilities measures will be implemented.

Much of the rhetoric around Aboriginal housing reform and housing services in the Northern Territory expounds the idea of investing in and aligning housing standards, housing services and tenancy responsibilities with those experienced by and expected of all other Australians. As the Northern Territory moves inexorably towards a public housing model across all Aboriginal settlements, mainstream social housing policy across the rest of Australia is actively progressing investment in community-based, locally owned and managed social housing that can provide not just housing but also support to assist with the social and economic participation of disadvantaged tenants (Plibersek 2009). Our research indicates that the drive towards shaping tenants to meet an idealised tenancy model means that Aboriginal householders are subject to a package of policy measures that are quite at odds with policy intent and action in the mainstream.

Turning to western Queensland and our research with the Myuma group, in its formative years the practices of the group largely retained an identifiable and well-defined regional scale, determined by (a) the location of enterprise activities and natural resource-based partners, and (b) the dominant community sources of labour. The geographic scales of governance that have now emerged in the history of the Myuma group are as follows:

- that of the Indjalandji-Dhidhanu tribal territory where the Dugalunji clan maintain traditional rights and practices of Aboriginal governance (the original core area)
- that of the north-west Queensland or 'Greater Mt Isa area' region where the Dugalunji leader Colin Saltmere was formerly ATSIC Chairperson and where he still has informal and formal collaborations with leaders from other Aboriginal groups (e.g. Waluwarra, Mitakoodi, Lardil, Kaiadilt, Ganggalida, Waanyi, Pitta Pitta, Wangkamanha, Kukatj, Kuthant)
- that of the upper Georgina basin and the wider Barkly Cultural bloc (encompassing the central-east parts of the Northern Territory) where Colin Saltmere is active as an Aboriginal law leader through his paternal descent group kin
- that of the catchment area of trainees for the Myuma training program, encompassing various communities in the southern Gulf, Cape York, and north Queensland, where Colin Saltmere has forged agreements with Aboriginal councils and community-based groups to conscript regular intakes of trainees; these community links, in turn, extend into individual family units
- that of Myuma's government and NGO clients mainly, embracing the north-west and Cape York mineral provinces and the local government areas of north-west Queensland.

The entities of governance can be seen to be a complex mix of corporate and non-corporate, formal and informal, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Attached to these overlapping but different scales of governance are variable decision-making processes and accountability processes, many of which are government-driven, but many of which are also distinctly Aboriginal. Particularly with respect to the first two scales of governance listed above, there is a strong use of and dependence on traditional Aboriginal Law. A specific feature of the Dugalunji Camp is the intermittent presence of Alyawarr and other Arrerntic-speaking Elders from the lower Sandover region, who subscribe to traditional Law and who are consulted regularly by Colin Saltmere on such matters.

These informal Aboriginal instruments of governance based on family, clan, kin network, cultural bloc, and initiates network are forms of social and human capital that are crucial to the success of the Myuma story but are so often undervalued, unrecognised and unrecompensed by government. These are underpinned by the cultural environment which strengthened collective responsibility for the work

of the Myuma Group as a whole but also the individuals within it, including trainees and their families. The multiple and dynamic spheres of Myuma governance and their various Aboriginal characteristics thus make for a complex political economy.

In Dajarra, the requirement to sustainably manage water on the scale of drainage basins, catchments and larger regions by necessity involves the State as the primary regulator of water supply and water service providers. In Queensland, management of water resources at the scale of catchment and drainage basin gives limited opportunities for the representation of Aboriginal organisations in developing water resources plans and involvement in natural resource management.

Small populations, remoteness and budgets can limit the capacity of shires to retain engineering and technical staff. This deficit in technical capacity at the municipal level will frequently require expertise that is supplied by the State government, either directly or through funding programs. The Queensland State Government has been open in its view on the service expectations of people living in remote settlements. Responding to press reports on the conditions for the Aboriginal population of Urandangi, Premier Bligh commented:

Many people choose to live in these very remote places because of other lifestyle reasons, and understand, I think, that not every service is going to be available to them. Having said that, I think there is significant opportunity for us to work with small towns in Queensland to develop alternative sources of power such as solar thermal. (ABC 2008)

As well as the State and local government responsibility for water service delivery, studies across remote Aboriginal settlements argue for greater community participation in the management of water supply (Beard 2006, p. 9; Grey-Gardner 2008; FRDC 1994, p. 169). In contrast to discrete settlements with greater autonomy than Dajarra, the method of integrating community involvement with local government administration (with a long history as the water service provider) would be the key to effective participation.

The suite of problems caused by the quality of water at Dajarra provides insight into the administration and delivery of housing by service providers operating from two levels of government. In Queensland, State control of housing can be compared to a Commonwealth-funded housing organisation, over a period of almost 40 years. In the Dajarra case study, the Aboriginal Housing Organisation, Jimberella Cooperative, appears to be more successful in providing housing, based on tenancy and the maintenance of housing (Long 2007). Jimberella is more successful at maintaining occupancy of its housing stock than Queensland Housing. The State is regarded by tenants as a less flexible manager of housing. Anecdotally, they are slow to respond to requests for repairs and maintenance, and these requests need to be phoned through to Mt Isa, usually through Jimberella offices as few State housing tenants have a phone.

Records kept at Jimberella Cooperative offices by the staff serve as a history of service interactions. Both Cloncurry Shire Council and the Mt Isa office of the ICC (FaHCSIA) were unable to find reports on the Dajarra water supply, which were quickly retrieved from the Jimberella archive. At the time of the request, the ICC was undergoing another reorganisation and name change. Local organisations that both represent the consumer and retain records of service delivery and the history of interactions can influence successful practice. Without this historical data, attempts to improve the service delivery, or manage demand, can be repetitive and inefficient.

In the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, our research indicated that service users valued the combination of a local Aboriginal-controlled implementing organisation in PY Media, combined with strong and consistent government support. The notion of 'Anangu running our own services' is a powerful one. In the case of the remote transaction centres it is sometimes expressed as 'our PY Ku, with us delivering the services and getting paid for it'.

Implicit in these statements is a desire for Anangu people to be in the front line of service delivery, but at the same time we observed a recognition of the importance of government in maintaining support for the centres and the processes that sustain them. In terms of responses to the research question, people favoured local governance arrangements but within a broader framework that ensured government interest and support. Of course, the short supply of individuals with specialist skills and knowledge within PY Media left the organisation vulnerable to losses of key staff and this put the program under heavy pressure when leading individuals left in late 2006.

The matter of governance and the balance between the roles of government and local organisations is a delicate one. One stark analysis of this subject in the case of PY Ku is that government holds the resources and transfers the risks on to the implementing agency, which is often the patron-client nature of contractual arrangements between government and non-government or private sector companies. While the service is functioning well, few problems arise from this. But when there are difficulties of staff turnover or financial viability, then tensions quickly come to the surface.

7.5 Service type and delivery style priorities

Research Question 4 asks: ‘What are the service type and delivery style priorities of consumers within a specified budget framework, and what is their capacity to participate and willingness to contribute to services?’

Our research on housing reform in the Northern Territory observed the stark differences between values and priorities on the demand side and supply side of the service equation. While administrative accountability is essential to government, family is most important to Aboriginal people. Recognising the extent of and the need to mediate the different sets of values and competing priorities in a ‘recognition space’ would help develop long-term, demand-responsive solutions to sustainable housing.

Demand-responsive services assume effective and sophisticated engagement with the consumer in the determination of the service. In housing and tenancy management reform in the Northern Territory, the lack of resident engagement in decision making is the outstanding feature. Thus the tenancy rules, including payment and conditions of occupancy, were set without explanation or consultation and the capacity to be involved through governance or other consultative mechanisms was greatly diminished.

Many of those interviewed in Ali Curung and Lajamanu were unhappy about the fact that despite rent being paid and the amount being acceptable under the existing regime, ‘rent not fixing our houses now. It’s like we live in humpies like in ’50s and ’60s’ (Ali Curung resident). Residents did not know where their rent money was going, for example to Territory Housing or to the Shires, under the old or the new arrangements, nor during the period of research were they aware of how much and why their rent might be raised. It was only in mid-November 2009, 18 months after the reforms commenced, that four households in Ali Curung, the first to be refurbished under SIHIP, were informed of the new rent for their refurbished houses. In one case, the rent was being increased by 50 percent. It was not clear to recipients what the basis was for the rent hike and what would be ‘provided’ as a result (Workshop feedback 16/11/09).

When questioned in the early part of the research about issues of maintenance, training and capacity, many householders indicated a willingness to participate in repairs and maintenance given knowledge and resources to do so. It would appear that the will to participate has been stymied in part by the continued pace of change and the revolving patterns of service providers such as painters and plumbers who in 2008–2009 have been at various times community-based, shire centre-based, or from somewhere else entirely under the NTER or SIHIP.

One example of where householders were effective in making priorities clear was the insistence of Ali Curung residents of the need to have houses painted as part of the SIHIP refurbishment. They were successful in winning concessions within the newly and lately imposed SIHIP priorities. This indicated community willingness to participate, to make choices between the priorities given SIHIP's 'specified budget'. This is, however, a singular example.

In combination with the impact of the NTER and the rapid imposition of the reforms with limited information and no choice being provided to householders about the conditions of their tenancy, this aspect of testing the effectiveness of demand-responsive services could not be furthered. It can only be assumed, given the minor indications noted, that given choice and information many householders would be willing to participate in a discussion about the shape of their contribution to improved housing.

Aboriginal responses to a survey in Dajarra and Urandangi were modest in their desire for types of services (Long 2008, p. 81). The main service priorities of local people were water, power, shelter and connection to country. For several decades, the quality of the drinking water in Dajarra has been placed at the top of service delivery priorities for the town. The town water supply service affects Dajarra residents in two ways: first through a lack of drinking water, and second, the effects of hard, saline groundwater on housing, energy consumption and household items. In responding to this research question, two considerations are the relationship of Dajarra people to potential improvements to the quality of the water service, and the potential contribution that the residents can make to ameliorate the consequences of living with the current bore water supply.

Dajarra residents expect that the water supplied to their houses should be of drinking quality. Older members of the community remember a direct connection of a group of houses to the railway bore, which provided water suitable for drinking. Community leaders can clearly articulate the problem, describe their priorities for service improvements, are often experienced in advocating for change and are capable of engaging in the discussion of service options. Participants in a survey expressed desire to engage with the Cloncurry Shire Council through possible options ranging from scheduled council meetings in Dajarra to the establishment of a representative position for a Dajarra resident. This person would attend meetings in Cloncurry to advocate for Dajarra (Long 2008, p. 10).

The ability of people to rely on rainwater for drinking, sourced from sub-optimal collection systems, demonstrates the resilience of the Dajarra people. This resilience and a history of building self-constructed camps and extensions to houses indicate the capacity to participate in management of household water supplies. A number of the more technically competent residents perform maintenance jobs for householders in Dajarra.⁴ There was evidence of minor adjustments to rainwater collection systems to increase the yield and prevent contamination from the evaporative air-conditioners, although the latter practice was not commonplace. This may be a result of passive use of rented housing in combination with a poor relationship with the service provider. In the survey by Long (2008), some tenants indicated that responsibility for all housing maintenance and repairs lay with the housing provider.

On the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, one observation that was continually reinforced by various respondents during the course of the evaluation of the PY Ku Remote Transaction Centre Program was that the vision of Anangu people and Government coming together to deliver services at the community level is highly valued. The presence of Anangu people as the majority of staff within the centres is a source of great encouragement and pride to local people, leading to higher use of services than would have been the case otherwise. Based on an evaluation of only the first phase of the program, rather than a longitudinal study showing service uptake by age group and gender, for example,

⁴ These members of the community tend to be men aged in their late 50s and older, who have had a varied and active work history, many employed in maintenance jobs on pastoral stations.

indications are that the remote transaction centre mode of service access is suitable for and attractive to Anangu people. Evidence of increased use of centres in neighbouring communities when a centre in one location was closed also shows a willingness of people to travel to use the services.

Although we make the qualifying statement again that these are early days for PY Ku, it is interesting to note that centre staff commented that support from family members and respect from the community are central to their motivation to do the work. Similarly, the pride of service users in the modern style and condition of the buildings also points to a strong preference for transaction centres as a service model. The fact that some respondents want to see more services provided through PY Ku, beyond Centrelink and to include banking, financial and video conferencing, reinforces the point. Reports of local people looking after the centres during periods of closure by sweeping the outdoor areas and tending the plants, is an indication of local commitment too.

In summary, the service type and delivery style priorities of service users in the communities that we studied could be said to be modest. People know that living in remote places means that choices will be limited. They also expect to pay higher costs for certain services. The widespread disenchantment with services that we observed stems from people's perception that their needs are not understood by service providers and that attempts to engage with them are usually either tokenistic or lack depth. This is where the recognition space arises again as an important concept within the research. The ability of individuals, households, service providers and policy makers to arrive at plans and, ultimately, results that are more favourable than those reported through our research depends on better quality interactions in this space. As we discuss later in the report, more consistent approaches to community engagement by service providers and better ways to learn from and replicate effective practice in this area are essential to achieving more demand-responsive services.

7.6 Critical issues and strategies to improve the service system

Research Question 5 asks: 'What are the critical issues and strategies to improve the service system, including the strengths and weaknesses of different technology and governance options?' The headings of technology and governance are broad and encompass the range of potential improvements. Our conclusion is that technological change may well improve the efficiency of planning and coordination of services. For example, computer-based service modelling can support improved decision making on services. The work we have conducted on such a system demonstrates the potential. And on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, the PY Ku Program has provided the greatest insight we have gained within Desert Services that Work into the potential for technology to directly address shortcomings in access to and quality of services in desert settlements.

However, technology does not offer scope for achieving the systemic and process improvements required in desert services. The real advances in service development to produce better outcomes lie within the broad category of governance. Definitions of governance emphasise decision making through appropriate structures and processes. The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) defines governance as 'the processes and structures (formal and informal) by which a group, community or society makes decisions, distributes and exercises authority and power, determines strategic goals, organises corporate and individual behaviour, develops institutional rules and assigns responsibility for those matters' (Hunt & Smith 2005, p. 2).

The Canadian Foundation for the Americas released a policy document in 2008 that defined the term 'Indigenous governance' as '[The] roles, responsibilities, and relationships that contribute to the social fabric or social capital of Aboriginal communities. These roles, responsibilities, and relationships are governed by norms and traditions, and contribute to decision-making processes. Aboriginal governance stems from a common interest in, and identification with, the lands and territories inhabited by

communities, and contributes to the setting of priorities in relation to internal and external influences that affect the social fabric of its members. The extent to which governance exists in a given community varies from case to case' (Canadian Foundation for the Americas 2008, p. 5).

In an earlier (2006) publication by the Foundation, Omaira Mindiola stipulates further: '[I]ndigenous governance goes beyond a simple vertical relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples ... governance is the way in which Indigenous society functions with its own system for exercising power, making decisions and resolving conflicts. These social structures and value systems differ from those of the national society ... yet the two systems must interact ... The notion of governance should thus entail a redefinition of the relationship between Indigenous and national societies defined in intercultural terms' (Mindiola 2006, p. 1). Our analysis is that there are certainly two central components to governance: structures and processes, but it is critical that these are considered in the right sequence, with appropriate processes taking precedence over structures.

In the Northern Territory, the research coincided with the first eighteen months of the implementation of major reforms to housing and asset management and the SIHIP program. At the two project research sites, Ali Curung and Lajamanu, it is clear that despite much hype very few tangible local changes have occurred. This highlights the very long lead times required to gear up large-scale programs and reforms, especially where such programs need to address issues of remoteness, cultural and geographic difference, and government and agency capacities. It also underscores the importance of understanding the key drivers, the variabilities and vulnerabilities, that shape remote (especially desert) living and service delivery (Stafford Smith & Cribb 2009) and require tailored and flexible approaches capable of working productively with variability, dispersal, strong local networks, small populations and extreme conditions. Such an approach to housing reforms would prioritise local governance structures and the need for local people to do more to manage and maintain the facilities and services they have, and that cannot be secured readily from great distances. It would require the design of infrastructure able to accommodate diverse family living arrangements and the inevitable mobility of people and resources that epitomise remote desert living, as well as innovative service structures and schedules commensurate with the skills of residents and issues of affordability, for both residents and service providers.

Program development must engage with the hierarchy of trade-offs that remote living necessitates, particularly the trade-offs between needing to contribute more of what you have and do to live where you choose and the exorbitant costs of running often inefficient centralised services. Part of the trade-offs must also be the securing of enough shelter (and through a variety of means, not just public housing provision) and essential services to match population trends and enable residents to leverage from the amenity provided by a 'house', to invest in building livelihoods for themselves and their children, and in securing improved health and wellbeing. Such an approach also requires social and economic change, but perhaps without the assimilationist overtones of current tenancy reform approaches.

It is clear that the majority of the people living in Ali Curung and Lajamanu have lived there most of their lives and will continue to do so, despite ongoing circular movements to service centres, schools, hospitals, sport festivals or country visits. The ties to place, to heritage, to family and their embeddedness within the political economy of remote Australia can delineate the dimensions of where the effectiveness of remote service delivery could be heightened. This could include delegated governance over negotiated aspects of housing tenancy management and associated services at local level, the development of a suite of service networks and supports against an agreed matrix of service and cost responsibilities and accountability monitoring mechanisms (downward and upward) that normalise ongoing improvements to housing stock, service regimes and social participation and inclusion.

In Dajarra, the service system is affected by the town's remoteness, low population size, and the absence of a proximal, high-value industry. A general perception that lower service standards are acceptable in remote communities may partly explain Government complacency in dealing with problems in outback towns, even with essential services such as drinking water (see ABC 2008). Dajarra, along with other regional towns with high Aboriginal populations, is on the periphery of the Queensland Government's Aboriginal policy priorities. Discrete Aboriginal communities in the Gulf and on Cape York Peninsula and Palm Island were the focus of the policy, funding and administration.

Given the responsiveness of government to media coverage, a key strategy to improve the service system is the effective use of the media to draw attention to critical local issues, and continued local advocacy to lobby State and Federal Parliamentarians. The skills required to advocate and lobby for a cause can be developed, but are helped by articulate spokespeople, speaking on behalf of the general community. Experience in administration and governance (Indigenous Housing Organisations, boards, representative bodies, committees, etc) helps to equip people with these skills. The advocacy also requires effective use of good quality data and advice on service-related problems.

In Dajarra, advanced technical solutions to the water problem, available to larger-scale settlements of unquestioned viability, are generally considered to be costly to install and maintain. Current approaches to rainwater harvesting are sub-standard and well below optimal capacity. An improvement would result from increased responsibility of the householder (through education programs), and greater community participation in installation and maintenance of systems, which requires the development of local technical skills. Although a level of technical capability exists in the older generations in Dajarra, the transfer of skill to the younger workers, many on CDEP, is less evident. Deficits of locally based technical expertise are common across remote settlements (Seemann et al. 2008, pp. 14–16).

It is doubtful that the volume of housing stock in Dajarra is enough to sustain more specialised trades and specific vocational training (Seemann et al. 2008, p. 17). There is potential to explore a regional repair and maintenance service based on identification of culturally motivated mobility patterns (Mommott et al. 2006). In the Georgina region, this 'beat' could include Boulia and Urandangi. Dajarra people have strong cultural ties to the Myuma vocational training facility run by Colin Saltmere at Camooweal. Plans to expand the range of training courses at Myuma, to include domestic building and repairs and maintenance, could help to create and maintain this capacity.

The Dajarra case, and findings from co-researchers, demonstrates the importance of the distribution of comprehensive service-related information communicated through appropriate media and content. For many services and members of the community, face-to-face interactions and explanations remain the best form of information delivery. There is an ongoing requirement for the exposure of people in remote settlements to information related to choice, demand management, and innovations in service delivery. Comprehensive data, often requiring research, experimentation and evaluation, is sometime necessary to help with improvement to service delivery and the resolution of problems – addressing the drinking water problem in Dajarra, for example.

Particularly because of the remoteness of places like Dajarra, the community should be encouraged to use digital technologies to gain information about service related issues, and to use the medium as a means of advocacy. Digital communication technologies require ongoing training and technical support (particularly given the rate of change in these technologies). In Dajarra, the local production of videos on history and Aboriginal culture, supported through Feral Arts, demonstrates the capabilities of Dajarra residents to use digital technologies. Locally produced video, which also involves interaction with the community, could be employed as a medium to distribute information on water and energy conservation and use. Approaches to service delivery need to encourage information sharing and distribution both within the community (Long 2007, p. 35) and between communities in the region.

Our research has found that the Jimberella Housing Cooperative was integral to the service interactions between the Aboriginal community in Dajarra and both mainstream and specific service providers. The Cooperative provides both the setting and agency that enables a level of 'community control in the effective provision of services' (FRDC 1994, p. 169). Strategies are needed that build on the existing capacity of Jimberella, as a local organisation, service provider, and service broker to the community. Yet criticism of Indigenous Housing Organisations (relevant to Dajarra in rent arrears and other economic indicators of function) has resulted in moves to mainstream housing, now under the guidance of the Queensland Government. Policy makers need to be wary that the short-term economic benefits of reducing or removing Jimberella could be 'offset by long-term damage to the community at large' (Judt 2009).

Local administration, record keeping, research and advocacy skills in Dajarra could be improved with support and training. There is also a requirement for consistent and ongoing supply of knowledge and independent advice related to services, preferably delivered in person to Jimberella board and administrators. The proposed changes to the function and funding of Jimberella in 2008 provide one example of the need for this type of support. A four-page pamphlet, and limited consultation from the State Government, outlined four choices that the Jimberella Housing Cooperative and Dajarra residents could make regarding their future. The choices ranged from transferring all housing assets to the State, to amalgamating with other housing organisations to form a regional housing service provider. This was a decision of great importance that involved considerable complexity.

Our response to Research Question 5 is discussed further in the findings and conclusion of this report. In summary, we discern five critical issues and strategies to improve the service system:

1. meaningful engagement between actors on the demand and supply sides of the service equation
2. capacity on all sides to plan, engage, monitor, measure and evaluate
3. continuity of strategy, especially through balancing management accountability with strategic rigour
4. flexibility and demand responsiveness of design and implementation of services
5. Effective evaluation for service improvement and potential replication of successful approaches.

These areas of improvement are developed fully in the conclusions to this report.

8. Findings

8.1 Systems analysis

Early in the project, the team started to consider services in terms of a system. Theories of complex adaptive systems (Chapman 2004) enable us to identify critical connections between functions that may not be apparent otherwise, to recognise the underlying problems and to think through options for systemic change.

Soft systems methodologies are also valuable in dealing with situations in which human perceptions, behaviour or actions are the dominating factors and where goals, objectives and even the interpretation of events are all problematic (Checkland 1999).

Systems analysis of services led to the research described in the section on service models. As Gibson describes in a paper for AusAID on investing in rural development, ‘by understanding and addressing the underlying constraints preventing systems from functioning effectively, agencies can achieve much greater and more lasting change. Conversely, approaches that don’t pursue a systems approach are likely to have limited and transient impacts. Systems can be understood with respect to their *multi-function* and *multi-player* character (2009, p. 5).

Gibson’s description of a rural development system, which he calls a stylised view of a system, is provided in Figure 8.1 below.

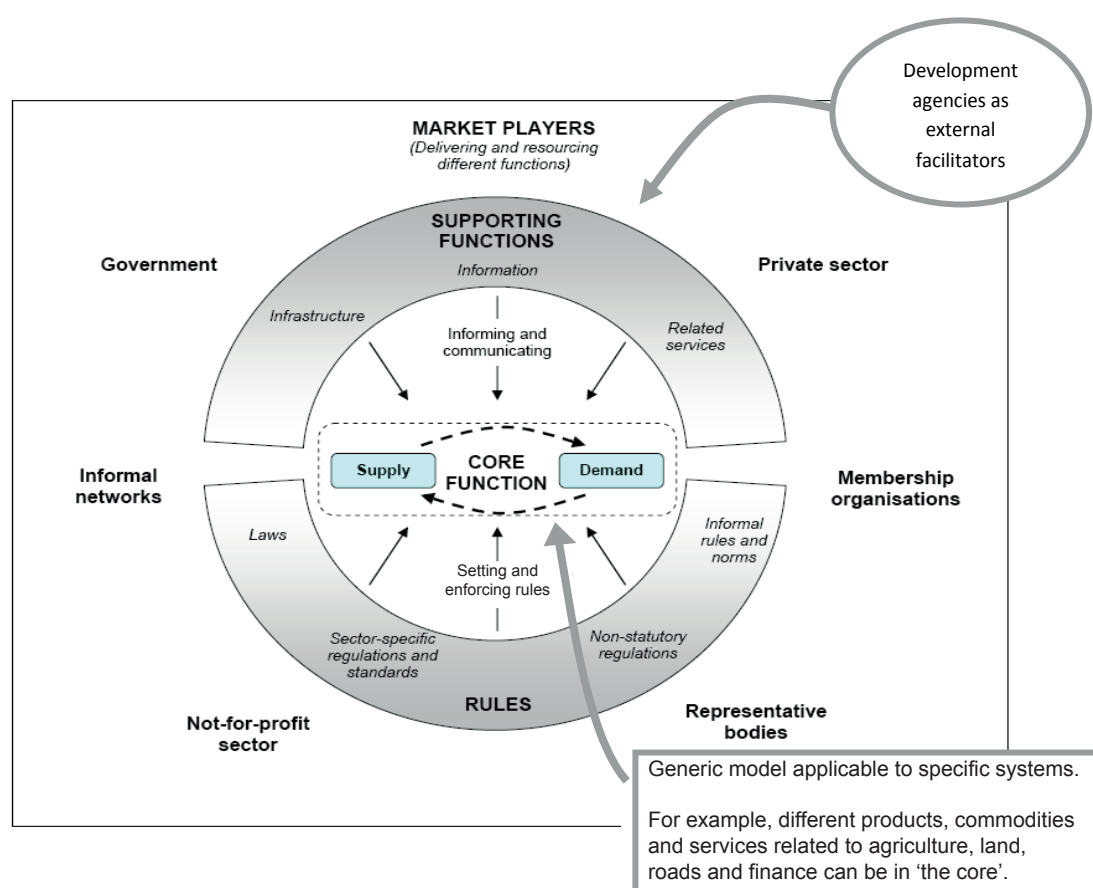


Figure 8.1: Stylised view of a rural development system

Source: Gibson 2009

Gibson goes on to define the three sets of functions within typical systems in rural development:

- the *core* exchange between provider and consumer – for example, a product or commodity or service
- the formal and informal *rules* shaping behaviour – for example, standards and regulations and, often more important, the usual practices and norms associated with systems behaviour
- the *supporting functions* which enable exchange, for example information on how to operate or who to link with (for) technical services, material inputs for businesses and research and development to promote innovation. (Gibson 2009, p. 5)

The value of systems analysis to our research lies in teasing out the key factors that influence the effectiveness of services. These include:

1. Complex layers and subsets of the service system: A typical example is where a major government service provider, such as the Water Corporation in Western Australia, subcontracts components of its services to specialist private companies, some of which operate together and some as individual suppliers.
2. Overlay of policy trends and agendas that are difficult for seasoned observers of Aboriginal affairs, let alone residents in remote places, to make sense of. In work with the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre, we observed the arrival of a new vocabulary that accompanied the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER): ‘people heard that jobs would be “normalised” and “mainstreamed”, there would be “compulsory acquisition” of Aboriginal land; people would be “transitioned” off CDEP, “income management” would replace CDEP wages, and Centrelink benefits would be quarantined’ (Kennedy 2009, p. 5). Interpretation of these words in a way that identifies continuation of previous policy or a shift of emphasis is important to understanding implications for services as a whole.
3. Supply chains: Our research in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands has shown that bureaucratic control of programs for servicing desert settlements is inherently too slow in responding to demand, inefficient in the application of resources, and prone to errors introduced through long supply chains. It uses as a case study the Regional Partnership Agreement entered into by three tiers of government and the not-for-profit organisation Ngaanyatjarra Council in 2005.
4. Entitlements to some services, consumer choices for others: This distinction may be important where the population of an outstation is growing and local people are seeking to work out their entitlement to a permanent telephone service under the Universal Service Obligation and in a way that does not apply to access to the internet for banking purposes, for example.
5. Flexibility and adaptability of services: Regulatory services, such as motor vehicle licensing or airstrip maintenance standards, are naturally less adaptable to local needs and demand than childcare or law and justice programs.
6. The influence of incentives that encourage certain behaviours on the part of service providers or users, for example, the costs of access to Centrelink services through a remote transaction centre versus travelling to town.

In considering desert services, a systems analysis enables us to visualise and identify aspects of services in a more holistic fashion than would otherwise be possible.

8.2 The supply–demand balance in service planning

Many programs and initiatives in remote Australia concentrate on developing and delivering their own services to a particular standard and therefore focus mainly on the supply side of the service equation. This can lead to an over-emphasis on delivery systems, as if a high-quality service delivery regime is enough. It tends to relegate service users to the role of passive recipients rather than active participants in design and delivery of services.

It is also the case that services are often defined solely by their budgets and the ability of providers to meet internal delivery targets within a particular time period. So it is little wonder that policy and practice remains overwhelmingly concerned with supply. After all, the supply of a service falls more within the bounds of our management control than the messy and chaotic business of engagement with service users to achieve more demand-responsive services.

A fixation on the supply side by government agencies and service providers hampers the improvement of services in three ways. It devalues the importance and the practice of evaluation, preventing learning from existing programs. It restricts the development of service models. And it constrains us in locating services within longer-term planning for communities and regions. Therefore services are implicitly considered a means of preventing or fixing a problem rather than a contribution to longer-term development goals in, for example, health, education or employment.

There is a power imbalance between service users and service providers, especially where government agencies provide services directly rather than through contractors. While non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tend to have choice about whether they will use a not-for-profit organisation, for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it is the only service choice, and practical representative voice, available. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly in rural and remote areas, depend upon their organisations for essential services such as primary health care and public housing. Basic services such as these are normally delivered to the mainstream population by government, or through government-sponsored private enterprise (see Dwyer et al. 2009).

Except in communities where leadership and governance are stable and strong, relationships between government and communities tend to fall into a pattern of patron–client exchanges. In the APY Lands, this became most apparent during a period of uncertainty about the continuation of the trial PY Ku Program, where control of the funding and therefore the future of the program was held entirely by government agencies. The implementing organisation for the program felt it was carrying a high burden of risk as a result of investments it had made over an extended period of gearing up to commence the services.

We have observed in the work of Myuma that when an Aboriginal service setting is established that it has the effect of ‘levelling the playing field’. In other words, it alters the imbalance of power which often characterises many transactions with Aboriginal people in government and commercial delivery settings whereby delivery is one-way with either no opportunity for Aboriginal negotiation as a consumer or alternatively any prospect of such negotiation being intimidated by discriminatory practices. The Aboriginal service setting of the Dugalunji Camp used by Myuma might be more accurately described as an intercultural setting with dominance of Aboriginal behavioural patterns and with ultimate Aboriginal control and management. It reflects an Aboriginal demand-driven form of cultural appropriateness.

Services exist to sustain individuals, families, businesses and communities. As we will discuss more fully in the section on development approaches to remote services, this is achieved most effectively when service providers shift the emphasis of their thinking, communication, planning and engagement towards users. In other words, they tip the balance away from the firmly supply-side drive of most government-funded services.

8.3 The strategy ceiling

As Mikkelsen has described, despite many trends and changes, international development ‘continues to be interpreted as a planning cycle, departing from project identification and following an objectives-orientated logical framework approach’ (Mikkelsen 2005, p. 28). This approach starts with a vision,

purpose and objectives for services, supporting them by a range of service activities that align closely to those goals and are designed with longer-term outcomes. The goal and vision remains paramount, with activities monitored and evaluated against their contribution to the objectives.

Remote services in Australia also follow a pattern that starts with policy and leads to the development of a set of project or program activities. The diagram below illustrates a planning framework in the context of remote services.

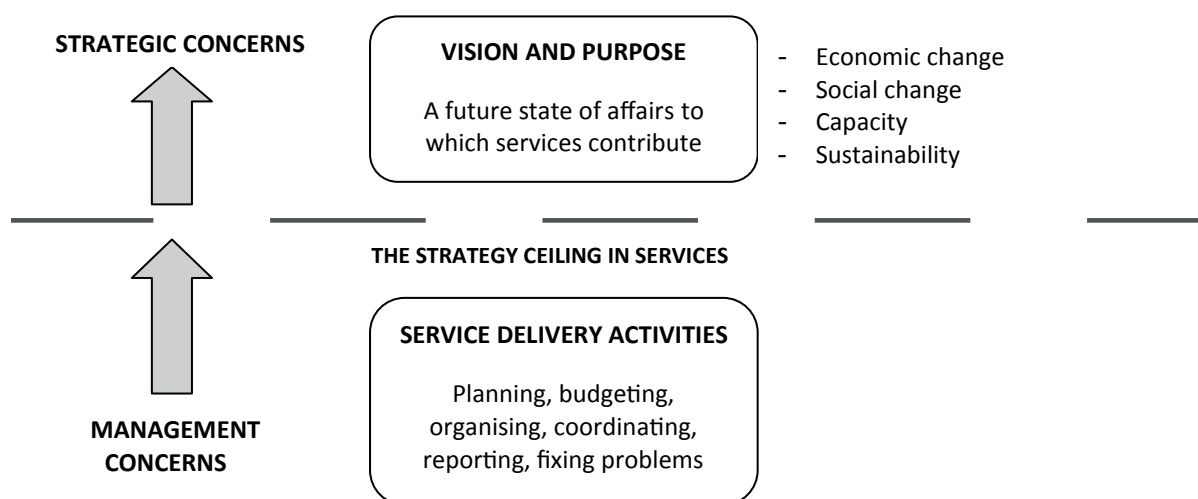


Figure 8.2: The strategy ceiling in services

The implementation of programs of remote services is a complex matter, especially when faced with the geographical challenges of remote Australia and the demands of working effectively across cultures. It is therefore not surprising that the business of remote services is frequently confined to the realm of management alone.

A workshop held by Parsons Brinckerhoff and DKCRC in Perth during December 2009 brought together representatives of several government agencies, service providers and research institutions concerned with access to services in remote regions of Western Australia. Participants discussed the everyday barriers that they face in being able to work effectively 'above the line' in Figure 8.2. These included difficulties in making the practical connection between day-to-day operations and long-term strategic goals, the lack of clear agreements of the scope and nature of those outcomes between communities and service providers, and a culture of project-defined short-termism in Aboriginal policy.

A successful shift of emphasis towards longer-term social and economic objectives can only take place if strategic matters are given proper emphasis in remote service planning, design and delivery. This requires conceptual and practical connections to be made between the services themselves and the longer-term human development aims of a community, a cluster of communities or a region. It means breaking through the strategy ceiling in services so that higher level goals can be properly addressed and therefore measured in the monitoring and evaluation of service outcomes. Most importantly, more strategic approaches help us to identify the critical combinations of services and skills required to stand the best chance of achieving higher level strategic objectives.

8.4 The role of services in community plans

Services have a purpose. At a fundamental level, they enable us to live where we want to live. Services provide the basic needs required for us to pursue work, family, social and leisure activities. However, despite their critical importance to settlement and community planning, services are rarely conceptualised as part of a long-term vision. It is as if our aspirations for the future take for granted the continuity of services to support them.

Meaningful community plans are hard to find in desert Australia. They often exist in the aspirations of local people and the goals they have for their communities. But they rarely make the transition into useable documents that can be considered in service design and development. While engagement between people across the demand–supply divide remains so inadequate, it stands to reason that service planning and community planning exist in parallel places.

As a result, policy is often developed in isolation from community aspirations in ways that have been revealed in several of our research activities, for example, the Ali Curung Shared Responsibility Agreement. The waves of policy initiatives that wash across desert Australia are notable mainly for the lack of proper input from Aboriginal people and an absence of countervailing policy ideas and objectives. The Northern Territory Emergency Response may have been the most vivid example, but all policy in recent years has been rolled out from State and Federal capitals in a way that appears divorced from feedback on the results of the previous tranche of reforms.

The ‘Closing the Gap’ targets are a valuable way of directing the service outcomes towards overarching objectives. However, while aspiring for undeniably critical improvements in health and education, they introduce the unhelpful assumption that standards for other aspects of living can also be subject to a national benchmark, rather than accepting that remote living carries compromises in choices, types and costs of services.

Our experience to date in assessing RPAs and SRAs shows the value of services also being considered central to the long-term goals of residents for their community. In other words, greater community ‘ownership’ can come from services being more closely aligned with community aims and, ultimately, economic development plans. This depends on communities being able to express their aspirations.

However, it also has to be acknowledged that long-term planning is a Western construct that has less meaning and less importance for Aboriginal people than it does in other places in Australia. The challenge for achieving demand-responsive services is to align them with community capacity and expectations for the future, which does not necessarily imply a grand vision or plan.

8.5 Local understandings of demand-responsive services

The insights gained from listening to people talk about the services that they use has built on our understanding of the meaning of demand responsiveness in services. At its most fundamental, people to whom we have spoken during the course of the research refer to demand responsiveness being most effective when Aboriginal people are service providers, implying that Aboriginal people are best-placed to know what kind of service model is most effective and to adapt their approach to changing circumstances and different people. For example, we have observed earlier in this report the positive impact on services made by trained Anangu people working in PY Ku Remote Transaction Centres.

In most research locations, we have noted the disjuncture between different sets of values and competing priorities between service providers on the one hand and service users on the other. Demand responsiveness relies on the factors that influence demand being acknowledged in the design and delivery of services. This, in turn, calls for the participation of the consumer in the way that the service is designed and developed. As we have seen through much of the research, engagement with residents is almost entirely lacking. In Ali Curung and Lajamanu, to give one example, the initial tenancy rules,

including payment and conditions of occupancy, were set without explanation or consultation, and the capacity for people to be involved through governance or other consultative mechanisms was severely limited.

Being demand responsive means much more than service providers coming to a better-informed estimate of what a community requires. The concept also goes beyond the development of better ways in which communities can interact with service providers. Demand responsiveness means access to services both to meet the broader needs of Aboriginal people and with a clear-sightedness about their capacity to make the best use of a service for their particular needs. In short, it means services at a level that can be handled locally with the assets available.

Moran (2008) cautions that pouring more resources into supply with no consideration of local capacity to benefit from the resources may fail to produce better outcomes. Demand-responsive approaches require service providers to take local capacity for partaking in a service into serious account when determining how to improve outcomes. He also cites World Bank research findings that ‘demand for a service is mitigated by the availability of quality and supply, and largely determined by the confidence that consumers have in a service provider’ (2008, pp. 193–94). This implies that people are more likely to use a service once the provider has proven itself capable of delivering adequate services.

Many householders in Ali Curung and Lajamanu, when questioned in the early part of the research about issues of maintenance, training and capacity, indicated a willingness to participate in repairs and maintenance given knowledge and resources to do so. The will to participate has been stymied in part by the continued pace of change and the revolving patterns of service providers, such as painters and plumbers, who in 2008–2009 have been at various times community-based, shire centre-based, or from somewhere else entirely under the NTER or SIHIP.

Further insight on this subject comes from Dajarra. Despite a long history of using mainstream services in an outback town, the Aboriginal people there identify as the ‘Dajarra mob’ and maintain distinctive Aboriginal lifestyles (Long 2005). The Jimberella Housing Cooperative operates as an intercultural service broker in an array of service areas, both formally and informally. In 2008, Indigenous Housing Organisations in Queensland were asked by the State Government to choose one of four options that would decide their future. The option to remove Jimberella (hand over housing assets and maintenance to the State), or to reduce its role in the community, would have resulted in the mainstreaming of housing services, through State Housing. The loss to the community would be the loss of an opportunity to build on the already extant capacity for community leadership, advocacy, education and the retention of ‘corporate knowledge’ of a long history of a diverse range of service supply and service demand.

In Dajarra, the Jimberella Housing Cooperative operates as both a local, multi-faceted service provider, and as an intermediary between the Aboriginal community and a variety of government and non-government service providers. Jimberella provides a point of contact between the Aboriginal community in Dajarra and service providers, and operates as a de facto representative body for the people of Dajarra. Jimberella staff and board members have the capabilities, backed by limited resources, to engage with external organisations, service providers and industry, for example, the Cloncurry Shire Council and mining companies. Community leaders in Dajarra, particularly members of the Jimberella Board, have used the news media to advocate for improved water supply (North West Star 2008; ABC 2009).

It would be going too far to suggest that simply decentralising decision making to local organisations will make services more demand responsive. All service providers need to be technically competent, command trust and respect, and be able to navigate local political and cultural demands. Nonetheless, there is a role for properly supported and accountable organisations in supporting better outcomes from services in a way that complete outsiders find much more difficult to achieve.

8.6 Indicators of service performance

During the course of the research, we rarely encountered examples of services whose performance was being measured rigorously against a set of indicators. Certainly, accountabilities for performance do exist in remote services, but these are almost entirely administrative accountabilities for the acquittal of funds rather than longer-term indicators against strategic objectives to which services contribute. This observation reveals again the strategy ceiling in services.

In the service-provision environment of the Western Desert, for example, communication is dominated by bureaucratic managerialism, which is symptomatic of a new public management that relies upon benchmarking and indicators. It is more than ten years now since Mowbray commented that bureaucratic and rationalistic policy is unlikely to be the right approach to cross-cultural governance and communication (Mowbray 1994). Bradford writes that comprehensive dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is required as a ‘continuous state of being’ between Aboriginal people and the institutional structures that surround them (Bradford 2004, p. 174).

While there is a shortfall in proper strategic planning and monitoring of desert services, many service providers in the Indigenous sector are over-regulated (see Dwyer et al. 2009; Sullivan 2009). Regulation takes two forms. There are rules imposed by the legislation that an organisation incorporates under, and there are conditions imposed by the various sources of an organisation’s funding. The first of these forms of regulation and control is the less onerous, but may still be inappropriate or ineffective. In return for the benefits of incorporation, principally limiting the individual liability of members if things go wrong, the law requires minimum standards of reporting to members and the general public, and usually also imposes some rules for transparent governance of the organisation.

If an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation incorporates under the Commonwealth’s Councils (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2007 (CATSI Act) it is subject to explicit imposition of rules for its structure and for its reporting. Failure to abide by these rules can result in the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations (ORIC) de-registering the organisation, or appointing an administrator. The CATSI Act does allow for different types of reporting according to the scale of the organisation, and the role of ORIC is often couched as enabling rather than punitive. Alternative forms of incorporation, under state associations acts, are available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (see Productivity Commission 2009, p. 6/4). These may suffer from too little administration, rather than too much. In comparison to the ORIC register, it is difficult to access information about the corporate structure and responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations incorporated under state laws, and the ability or willingness of state regulatory offices to intervene to protect members’ interests is patchy at best.

The second tier of regulation and control of Indigenous sector organisations is through grant funding contracts. The Indigenous sector is particularly vulnerable to inefficiency and inappropriate service delivery because of its reliance on government funding, and consequently remotely conceived policies, and remotely administered regimes of regulation and accountability. The burden lies both in continual application for grants on an annual cycle and continual multiple reporting for their acquittal. Standardising the application procedure would be the simplest part of reducing this burden, and therefore increasing the efficiency of organisations, but this has not been well achieved even within the single jurisdiction of the Commonwealth. The Howard Government attempted to introduce a standardised online application procedure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program funding called ‘eSub’. Some five years after its introduction most Commonwealth-funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs are not available for e-sub application.⁵

⁵ The eSub portal lists six programs ‘available using the eSub kit’. Each of the six is a hyperlink to the web pages of other Commonwealth agencies. Some programs described on the subsequent web pages are not available for eSub but require competitive tender (eg http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Indigenoulawandnativtitle_Indigenoulawprograms_LegalaidforindigenousAustraliansprogram). Others, such as the native title representative services program, do not lead to any direct grant funding information. The eSub portal also provides a link to other government Indigenous programs, which number some thirty-five, some of which offer their own application processes for funding, while others are simply descriptive of government initiatives <https://www.indigenous.gov.au/eSub/PublicPages/ProgramInformation.aspx> [accessed 04/01/2010].

If the Commonwealth has not been successful in standardising grant applications, it has been less so in standardising reporting requirements once a grant has been achieved. Grant applications are assessed by each Commonwealth agency separately, matching them to a wide range of programs each with different aims and requirements. While standard contracts may result, each has particular schedules attached with multiple ill-matched reporting requirements and timelines. Some headway has been made in the area of primary health care through the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) Strategic Development and Reporting Framework, though this is still incompletely implemented.

However, while we lament the overwhelming focus of accountability on administrative matters, not all services are defined this way. The Regional Partnership Agreements and Shared Responsibility Agreements studied by researchers in Western Australia and the Northern Territory certainly include strategic indicators. The illustrations below show the central objectives of the Ali Curung Shared Responsibility Agreement:

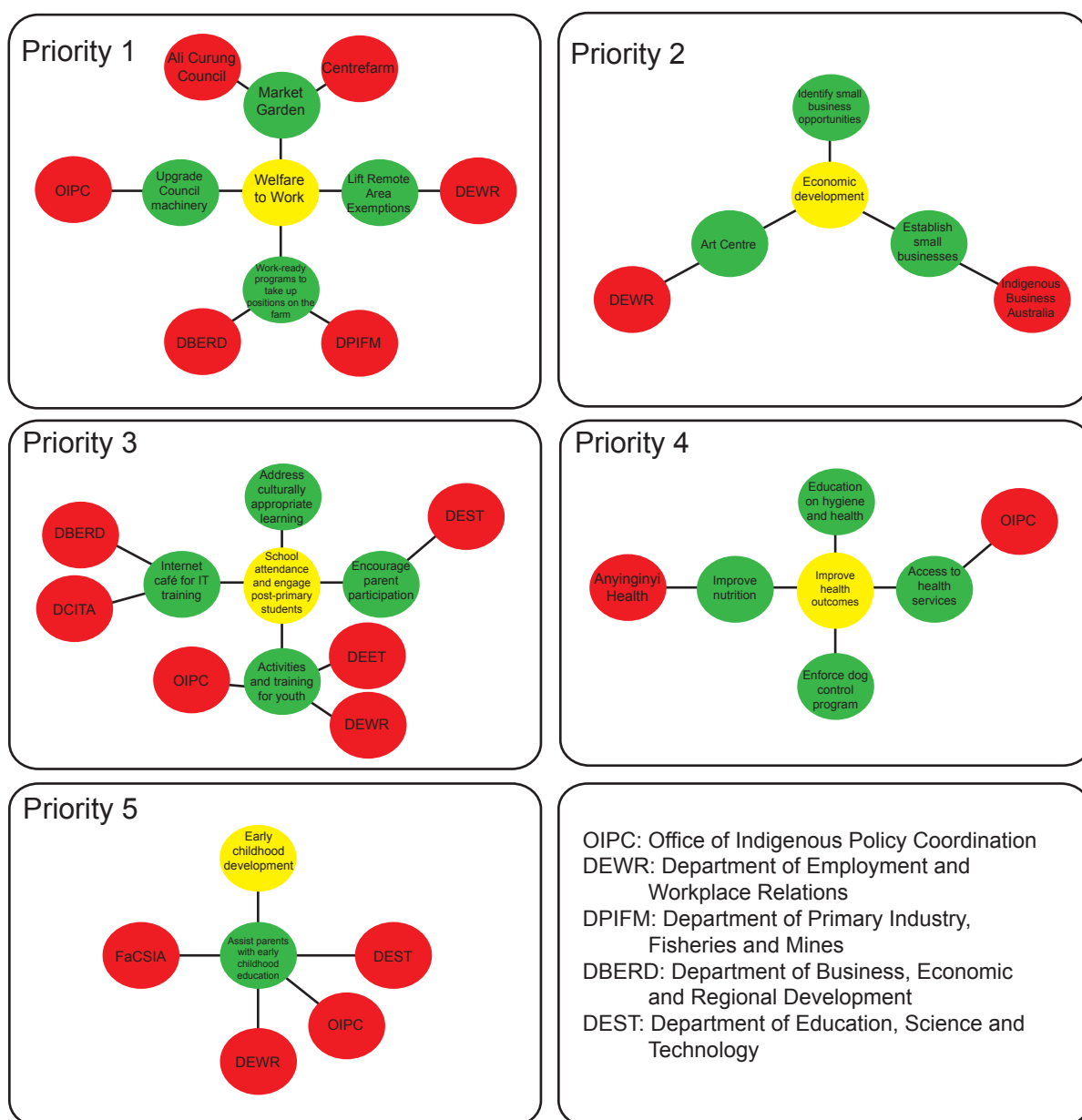


Figure 8.3: Priorities under the Shared Responsibility Agreement in Ali Curung and their relationship to implementation and to government agencies

Source: Wright 2011

While a coherent and strategic approach is apparent, the measurement of results fell short of the rigour required and, as we argue in the previous section, a drift of all stakeholders away from the higher level objectives occurred over time.

The overall picture that we have developed is that the measurement of the performance of desert services is characterised by instability. On the one hand, ongoing reporting requires administrative detail that does not address longer term strategic outcomes from services, such as those that impact on economic development. But on the other hand, occasional government initiatives that are heralded by a policy announcement, such as on growth towns or regional partnership, are heavily strategic but also time-bound. Once the dust has settled on a strategic policy, business returns to the previous pattern of administrative reporting. As we have seen, research with people at the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre points to ‘the need to create a level playing field within which the Aboriginal participants can meaningfully contribute to and participate in the programs and services that are meant to benefit them. Not only does it require conditions which enable Aboriginal people to understand and make sense of government initiatives, but also that governments reach a more informed understanding of Aboriginal aspirations and realities’ (Kennedy 2009, p. 17).

For this to happen, better processes and models for engagement with communities are needed. We return to this subject later in the report.

8.7 Intermediary actors and boundary spanning

In examining the demand–supply divide in services and the way in which values and priorities diverge sharply between actors on each side, our research noted the role of intermediary individuals and organisations in bridging the gap. Drawing on the work of Williams (2002) and Horlick-Jones and Sime (2004), we have called them boundary spanners.

Our basic premise is that many of the direct providers of services to desert communities, the organisations in the Indigenous sector,⁶ have been neglected as an essential component of any plan for improved services. All facets of existence in remote communities are affected by at least one, and often many, Aboriginal not-for-profit organisations. Yet they receive little attention in the current policy environment established by the National Indigenous Reform Agreement.

There are about 2700 organisations currently incorporated under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act (2006). There are at least as many incorporated under various state regimes, or the Corporations Act (2001)⁷ (Corrs et al. 2002, p. 24). The vast majority of these are non-commercial organisations. An estimate of 5000 organisations in the Indigenous sector is conservative. Matching known Aboriginal organisations to a map of Aboriginal service centres within the arid and semi-arid areas (Taylor & Bell 2004, p. 24) produces a figure of 1035 organisations in this geographic region. As these service centres are remote, and typically lack the depth of government agencies and other not-for-profit service providers found in more settled areas, Aboriginal organisations are likely to be the source of the large majority of available services. The sector is comprised of distinct service domains:

- community-controlled Aboriginal Health Services
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- multi-purpose ‘resource agencies’ and outreach services targeting dispossessed town fringe groups and homeland communities
- arts and media centres, radio and television broadcasting stations, musicians’ cooperatives and dance companies.

⁶ As described below, this paper adopts the term Indigenous sector from Rowse (2005).

⁷ A database of Indigenous sector organisations currently under construction by AIATSIS presently counts 4800 organisations. This has been compiled from the Commonwealth Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations register and some public directories. It does not yet include a large number of organisations incorporated under state associations legislation.

- community-controlled schools and education advisory or lobby groups
- communal councils, holding and administering Aboriginal land, providing municipal-type services
- land councils, sometimes as statutory bodies, in other cases as voluntary advocacy organisations
- language research and maintenance centres
- sports associations
- environmental ‘caring for country’ collectives, such as ranger programs
- communally owned pastoral and farm industry organisations.

These subcategories themselves harbour considerable diversity. They are largely established on the model of a voluntary association where a membership elects a governing council to administer benefits for members and wider constituents. Some organisations cross-fund their social aims with commercial activities. For example, an Aboriginal medical service may pay for its doctors by bulk-billing Medicare (though most rely instead on direct grants). Some, such as the Ngaanyatjarra Council, which featured as a subject of our research, operate fee-for-service building, transport, accountancy and security services. Fees, in this case, are normally paid from grants by government agencies to the member communities that employ the Council’s services. In common with many larger Aboriginal organisations Ngaanyatjarra Council is also a trustee, sometimes through a subsidiary, for trusts that have commercial operations. Several organisations use this model to invest in commercial enterprises on behalf of members, to whom they distribute benefits. Many community organisations also operated Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) registers and subsidise their service functions by using CDEP workers.⁸

There is roughly one not-for-profit organisation for every ninety Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens. This is a crude calculation, but serves to illustrate in raw terms the prominence of communal organisations in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life. With more than three decades of experience in a very challenging field the sector is still barely acknowledged for its contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development. It is rarely seen as a distinctive nation-wide network, and consequently it is under-resourced and lacking support in government planning. Part of the reason for this is historical. The sector received its greatest impulse during the period when policy was formulated under a banner of self-determination, and this encouraged its fragmentation. Self-determination was least challenging for settler interests if it was seen as essentially local self-governance. The practical delivery of services appeared as a subsidiary effect of the aspiration for a distinctive but politically dependent status in the Australian constitutional landscape. Each community service organisation largely struggled, and continues to struggle, alone. There are still few regional, state, or national coalitions of organisations working in a particular service or field of endeavour, and their influence is slight in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Still less are the disparate fields of service, whether health, arts or land, for example, seen as having anything in common with each other. Consequently they are not given much attention as an important, though distinctive, part of the Australian not-for-profit sector as a whole.

Aboriginal organisations often deliver services that normally are the province of government agencies. The sector is the principal form of engagement between mainstream Australia and its Indigenous peoples. In rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in particular, few services are delivered directly by government. Even the core cadre of street-level bureaucrats – teachers, nurses and police – are provided by, or supplemented in partnership with, community-owned schools, community-controlled health services, and local night and dawn patrols or wardens. In most Aboriginal areas municipal services (water, sewerage, electricity, roads), housing and maintenance, and welfare payments, are handled entirely by Indigenous sector organisations.⁹ It has no direct counterpart since

⁸ The CDEP program is being wound up (<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/progserv/families/cdep/Pages/default.aspx>). This threatens the viability of many of these organisations unless their workers are re-engaged under standard employment contracts.

⁹ This is changing, perhaps fundamentally. Sullivan (2011) outlines the challenges to Indigenous service organisations posed by the policy of ‘normalisation’, which encourages more direct service delivery by state and territory governments.

it is a service provider, frequently a form of communal or local level governance, and the major expression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civil society. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are the basis of civil society for Aboriginal cultures that in the past had no use for such a concept. They are both drivers of positive social change and manifestations of such social change. This last point is important for the improved effectiveness of government policy goals. As public attention focuses on the ‘dysfunction’ of Aboriginal communities, and government programs are increasingly delivered by mainstream processes, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civil society institutions need support and encouragement as the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander modernisation. Instead, they are in danger of increasing neglect.

This neglect has been observed through research we have conducted in all four jurisdictions covered by Desert Services that Work. In the Western Desert and East Pilbara, previously described in this report as a service environment in which Martu people are unrepresented, ‘the productive connections that do occur between government, industry and Martu are largely negotiated by Martu leaders or by non-government (or less often government) actors who exist in the borderland between these distinct worlds. Martu leaders often act in this role in addition to their other community responsibilities, for the ‘good’ of their community. In industry, key actors act in a similar fashion by providing connective bridges. These individuals can be described as boundary spanners who build bridges and broker to allow for the survival of the overall system. This role is well recognised within organisational literature (for example, Williams 2002) but in desert Australia it is largely not paid for, nor resourced, and is often not recognised. But without these individuals and organisations it is likely that the system would not function even to the extent that it does now. Individuals in non-government entities, government agencies and within the private sector often take on this role in addition to an existing job description (with associated roles and responsibilities) and appear to perform this role from an altruistic obligation that emerges from long-term engagement with Martu people. This is largely forced by the fact that Martu people tend to operate from a relational worldview and engage more easily in communication with individuals who have proven themselves trustworthy and who have a recognisable identity within the ‘mob’ generally. The accountabilities of Martu leaders and organisational actors in this role are complex, and at times may be contradictory’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 14).

Similarly, we have observed the role that other organisations play in bridging the boundary between Aboriginal people and service providers in other locations in which research was conducted. Staff of the Jemberella Cooperative, Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre and Ngaanyatjarra Council all play varying roles in interpreting policies and working with local people to gain the most from services. And it is also worth noting that our research in the Northern Territory shows that the Territory Government’s efforts to foster representative bureaucracy may have encouraged greater exchange and skill-sharing between the Indigenous sector and the Northern Territory Public Service (Ganter 2010).

8.8 Person-dependent v. system-dependent practice

Good practice exists in many services but often, as we have observed in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in WA, the effectiveness of a service relies on a particular individual or team. When they leave, the likelihood of practice being maintained is often low. The issue for desert services that work is how good practice can become more integrated into service systems.

A starting point is the identification of the key ingredients of effective practice and this report goes on to suggest improved approaches to monitoring and evaluation that enable a more thorough and systemic understanding of services to be achieved by government, business and communities. The problem is that examples of effective services largely happen in isolated bubbles of activity. Too often, good practice is not articulated and its value is not recognised. As a result, the potential for replication is not realised and opportunities for systemic change are not identified. Overall, the wider benefits of good practice are not properly achieved (Dyer & Fisher 2009).

Myuma is an example of an effective service provider that has been developed over several years and for which the leadership of a single person has been critical. Colin Saltmere, as General Manager and a senior Aboriginal man, has been central to all the developments of the Myuma Group since it started in 2002. Our research on Myuma certainly points to its success being attributable to strong leadership, but equally important has been a solid foundation of corporate teamwork, involving both staff and family, as well as the supportive network of outside advisors and advocates for the Myuma Group, who come from diverse professions and career paths.

Ultimately, our research has shown both the value of the contributions of individuals and families to effective services, but also a shortfall in methods that enable newcomers to work well within existing systems. Too often, succession and handover arrangements for new staff involved in services receive little attention.

8.9 Resource flows for services

Substantial flows of resources into Aboriginal communities is relatively unusual other than down vertical routes from central government through the ‘command control’ chain, yet the Myuma Group has captured both lateral (industry) and vertical (government) resource flows within its unique structure.

A major challenge of effective service delivery in Aboriginal Australia has been the integration of numerous State and Commonwealth programs, whether in the fields of health, infrastructure, housing, health, training, education, recreation, etc, and as witnessed by the efforts over recent years of the COAG trials and partnerships. An aspect of the Myuma training project is the skilful integration of Commonwealth and State programs to tap key funding sources as well as the cooperative participation of senior public servants from various departments in the monitoring and guidance of the project. This is achieved through Myuma’s reputation for professional levels of performance and the subsequent widespread respect for such by both industry and government personnel.

The value of the Myuma case study has thus been to recognise Aboriginal groups who are creatively procuring resources from non-government and non-vertical programs and using those resources to control service delivery in certain ways at the local level for the good of a regional Aboriginal collective. Such case studies are important in understanding techniques of creating local political control and stability of service delivery in the face of, or in spite of, the policy shifts, vagaries and uncertainties of the vertical delivery systems of the Australian and State governments and the associated welfare dependency.

Whereas there are interesting case studies of this type characterised by mining subsidies in the various Australian mineral provinces, the Myuma Group in Camooweal is a particularly interesting example as it has used a combination of State and Commonwealth Government resources and private industry goodwill and capital to create a relatively stable socio-economic position, which is in turn partially insulated against any possible future fluctuations of either government or private resourcing.

Whereas Myuma has made impressive progress in terms of its social, cultural and economic sustainability, there are clearly issues to be addressed with its environmental sustainability. In particular, the rising cost of fuel, which is necessary not only for the Myuma fleet of vehicles but for powering the Camooweal generator, is an expensive and environmentally critical resource. Alternate fuels and power sources need to be explored for the future of Myuma. Recently, some \$3.2 million of funding has been allocated by the Commonwealth Government to the Dugalunji Camp to upgrade the training facilities on the site and this presents an excellent opportunity to incorporate more sustainable management practices into the camp, aimed at reducing the current electricity requirements and to possibly reconfigure the water, waste and food cycles in the camp to manage usage and ultimately reduce consumption and cost.

9. Conclusions

9.1 Interactions between users and providers of services

In desert services, there is a significant mismatch between supply-side activities and demand-side realities. This theme recurs throughout the research and is a consistent factor in all cases where the performance of services is falling short of expectations.

A first step for all parties is to acknowledge that the service system has a critical zone in which demand and supply interactions take place. Adapted from Taylor's (2008) use of Mantziaris and Martin's 'recognition space', we consider this a valuable concept (shown again below). We argue that a focus on improving communication, negotiation and understanding in this space is essential if the continuing discordance between government program implementation and residents of remote Aboriginal settlements is to be mitigated.

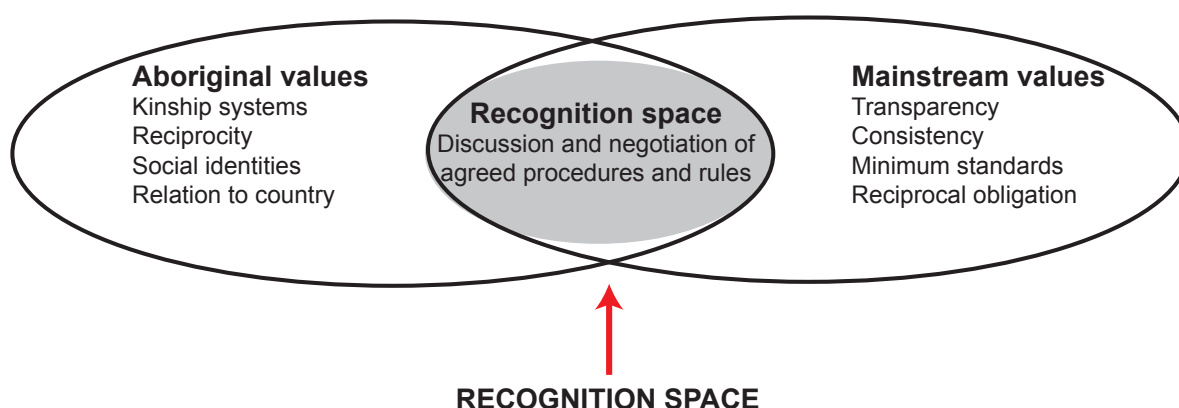


Figure 9.1: The recognition space for demand responsiveness in housing

We have observed from our research in Lajamanu and Ali Curung that achieving understanding also means that service management and development need to recognise and accommodate the phenomena of agency and intra-community mobility, whereby a substantial percentage of households regularly change composition and houses, impelled primarily by the prerogatives of family and culture.

Communication includes effective consultation and information distribution processes to reduce the damage done by the concomitant constant turnover in government staff that results in the loss of corporate memory, competencies and, most importantly, effective working relationships. However, this is only one element of a much more sophisticated approach to engagement that recognises the complexities we have described elsewhere in this report. This includes 'processes that enable more participatory models of program development and delivery that value relationships, long time horizons, effective communications and work with Aboriginal aspirations. These elements are critical to the development of trust and mutual understanding which form the basis through which agreements and partnerships can be brokered' (Kennedy 2009, p. 1).

Returning to the work with Martu people, the analysis of boundaries between different players in the East Pilbara and Western Desert sheds further light on the subject. 'As Langton (1993) has argued and McIntyre (2003) also emphasises, there is a need to allow deliberative dialogue across cultural boundaries in complex planning issues (see Gastil & Levine 2005). Deliberation will allow for numerous perspectives that exist across boundaries to be connected and juxtaposed, allowing for the birth of alternative perspectives with the aim of creating long-term, cross-cultural and sustainable planning strategies. Deliberation will need to allow for diverse cultural narratives and will require

alternative forms of documentation, for example, an emerging Martu film unit provides a mechanism to record deliberations visually. There are a number of key areas that cross organisational and cultural boundaries, and which require careful and long-term deliberation in the desert across the range of actors who co-exist within the system. No mechanisms currently exist to support initiation or provide long-term support for processes of deliberation' (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 14).

Sophisticated engagement between service users and providers would allow for discussion of the differences between values and priorities. Effective processes would permit contentious issues to be identified and for all parties to work through them in a constructive way. The challenge of reaching positive agreements and outcomes when working across cultures is not to be underestimated, but this is the essence of the work required to achieve better outcomes from services. It is an investment on all sides that is preferable to the legacy of bad feeling and disillusionment that we have observed frequently through the course of this research.

There are many ways in which progress could be made. Participatory methods have been used internationally for many decades and the lessons from them are well-documented. We have observed that Martu people responded well to tools such as the participatory problem tree and institutional mapping processes used in our research in Western Australia. Using participatory methods allows for cross-cultural understanding, not only of the data collected but also for data analysis and the presentation of findings. This understanding is a necessary prerequisite for ongoing dialogue about the issues faced by Martu people and the service sector, and for shared participation in the implementation of strategies to address these issues.

The use of participatory methods holds potential for enabling a more dialogical and deliberative approach to cross-cultural communication in remote Aboriginal Australia. However, such tools will only be effective if other conditions exist that achieve proper engagement with Aboriginal people. In other words, there is no short cut. Proper participatory approaches to service design and development require the comprehensive understanding of service providers of the importance of trust and the priorities of Aboriginal service users.

In this context it is interesting to juxtapose two studies undertaken within the Desert Services that Work project that examined engagement of Aboriginal people in service delivery in the Northern Territory: one from the perspectives of Aboriginal people in very remote desert settlements in the region served by the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre and the other from the position of Aboriginal people working in government administration in the Northern Territory. Despite the very different positions of each area of research, common to both these works in progress are findings about the deep value to service delivery of open Aboriginal engagement. Both studies complicate the idea that there can be a simple delineation between the arenas of supply and demand. Aboriginal people are acting as agents of service delivery, whether they are in Indigenous sector organisations or through their employment in government departments.

Within the administration and at the point of service delivery there is valuable knowledge, capacity and relationships that offer significant potential for improving decision making. In the Northern Territory, we observe that Aboriginal employees have capacities and links to Aboriginal networks outside the bureaucracy that, when valued, create connections to communities that enhance service planning and decision making. Research at Tjuwanpa shows that Aboriginal communities struggle to understand and respond to the many policy and program changes that affect their day-to-day lives. In other words, both studies identify a problem in what the supplier sees and values, and how demand is thereby depicted. Government investment in time and relationships would harness Aboriginal people and engage them in service planning and delivery decisions. Meanwhile, Government policy rhetoric, both at national and Territory levels, stresses the importance of engagement but does not make provision for the conditions under which it might emerge.

Tailored and flexible approaches are needed that are capable of working productively with variability, dispersal, strong local networks, small populations and extreme conditions. We believe that it is possible to reach beyond the platitudes of language on participation and empowerment into more active engagement of people in services. In remote settlements, the effectiveness of any policy will depend on the capacity of service providers to work effectively with residents, as well as Aboriginal people to respond.

We qualify our arguments for better practice in community engagement and evaluation by acknowledging criticism of the work of non-government organisations in this area (Buckland 1998). Community engagement, like participation before it, will become diluted in its value if both government and NGOs are excessive in their promotion of it, while failing to distinguish between true engagement and simply consultation that enables boxes to be ticked in the column marked ‘talk to community’. Our point is that the users are not always right. Services have to be designed and implemented within a range of parameters. But ongoing failure to understand the perspectives of users and to build long-term relationships with them undermines good design.

9.2 Development approaches

A stronger development focus within services would go some way towards addressing problems in desert services that our research has identified. Development approaches to services set out to achieve human development goals through improved access to services. The concept of development is, however, often ill-defined and unclear. In this section we present introductory material on the subject.

Development is a process by which skills, knowledge and resources are brought together by governments, communities and the private and non-government sectors with the purpose of promoting human development. As such, development encompasses health, education, human rights, poverty reduction, the environment and related issues. A recent expression of international development objectives was the statement of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2010).

A development approach is therefore one which places human development goals at its centre. In services, this implies that the purpose of access to an essential service such as energy is not just about being able to switch on an electric light or power a tool, but is a means for an individual or a household to achieve improved health, wellbeing, education, security or other higher-level human development objectives. But development approaches are also about process. In practice, this means participation, sustainability, empowerment and ownership of development by those who stand to benefit from it.

In the context of services, development approaches have three key elements:

1. Well-defined development goals form a basis for the planning of effective programs. These often emphasise positive social and economic change, such as poverty reduction, for example.
2. Empowerment of communities involved in and affected by infrastructure and services is fundamental to achieving these goals, with the participation of individuals, families and communities as both a means and an end of development approaches.
3. Routine service delivery, with its central need for technical and professional competencies, can be oriented towards development objectives provided that enabling conditions are established for this transition to occur. These conditions include multidisciplinary teams, use of suitable planning tools and processes, and the commitment of key players, especially the service provider and the community.

The challenge in desert services is for strategic objectives to connect with and influence the day-to-day work of delivering services. Otherwise, the fine aspirations developed in policy or through service planning and which may include social, economic and human development objectives, soon become

diluted in their relevance. Proper review and evaluation processes would help address this issue. Ultimately, despite this, the ability of services to operate according to well-founded principles of development depends on capacity.

Better outcomes from services could be achieved by taking an approach that orients services towards human development objectives. In practice, a development approach to services integrates well-defined development goals, empowerment of community members to participate in service design and planning, and establishing enabling conditions such as improved service settings and planning tools. Nonetheless, as discussed earlier, often there exists a lack of coherence between strategic goals in service design and the realities of operational service delivery in remote Australia. The Closing the Gap framework, which is effectively a set of development objectives for desert services, does not connect closely with operational realities of services. It does not translate into a set of objectives to which services make a long-term contribution.

Aspects of the service system in remote Australia present opportunities for change. Ultimately, service providers, the users of services, and those who develop policy and provide funds for service delivery need to ensure that they are focused on the strategic goals of services. This includes putting in place those processes and procedures that reduce the chances of strategic drift away from development objectives.

9.3 Supporting functions for improved services

Change is not possible without the means to achieve it. Returning to Gibson's stylised view of a system (shown again below), it is useful to note the importance of the supporting functions that enable exchange which, in desert services, means the interaction between supply and demand.

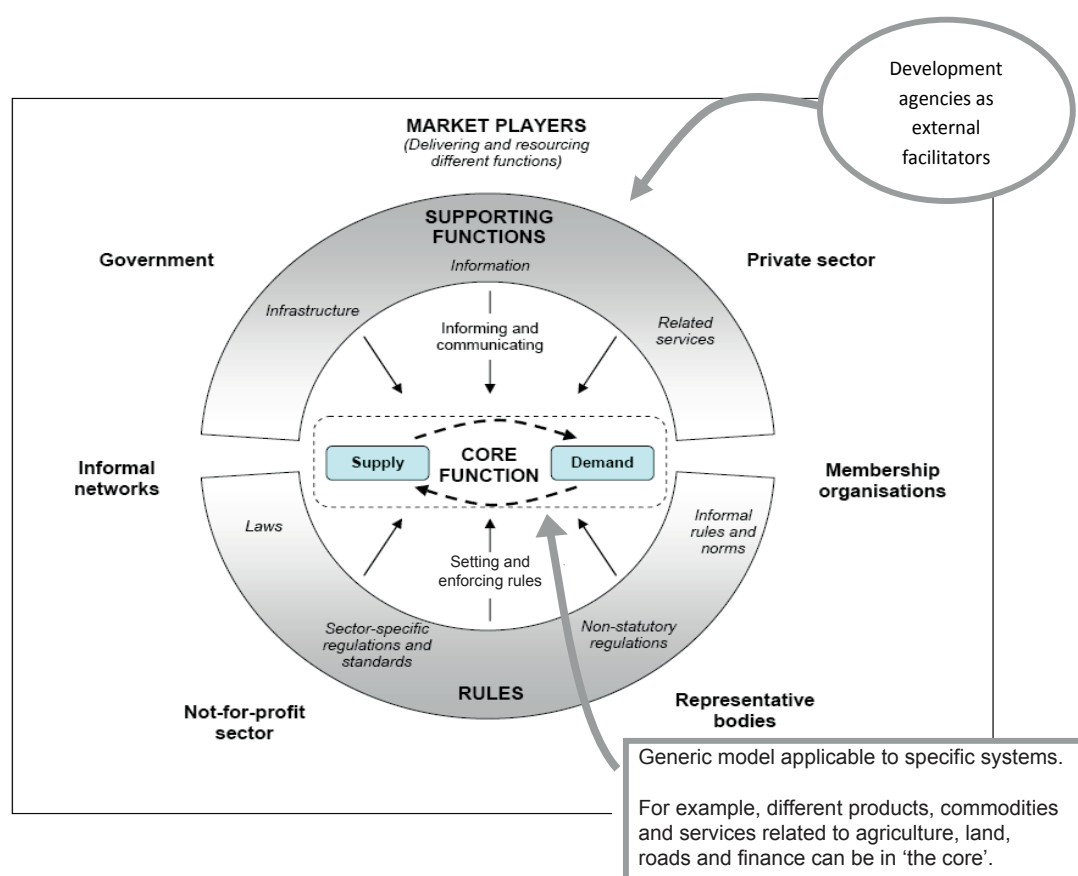


Figure 9.2: Stylised view of a system
Source: Gibson 2009

It is simplistic to say that capacity needs to be developed or that existing skills and knowledge should be strengthened, without working out exactly to which end they are to be directed. Instead, supporting functions are required to enable better service outcomes to be achieved. These lie in four areas:

1. improved processes in the recognition space
2. stronger intermediary and boundary spanners
3. reducing the influence of the strategy ceiling through strategic leadership and management competencies
4. more effective evaluation and learning, especially through selecting and measuring the most appropriate indicators

In the Western Desert and East Pilbara regions of Western Australia, ‘Martu people have limited understandings of the ideological underpinnings of policy or of government and industry more generally. In fact, both government and industry are seen as monolithic entities whose rationality is unfathomable. This limited foundational understanding is constantly exacerbated by seemingly irrational “consultative” practices of government and industry based on the need for rapid expenditure of funds over short time frames with little time spent in the “field” to explain the processes involved. The moments of connection initiated by government and industry with Martu are largely oriented towards who is available to speak in a “community” on the day that the government and industry actors arrive into the “community” space, usually with little notice. Martu connections with government are primarily forced through the need to submit forms, many of which are not understood by Martu individuals’ (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 15).

This subject brings us back to thinking about the competencies required by government agencies to enable better engagement with Aboriginal people. The remoteFOCUS initiative of Desert Knowledge Australia is developing a set of reform proposals, one of which aims to build the effectiveness of public servants to engage with communities in remote Australia (Desert Knowledge Australia 2009). An approach to improving communication in the Western Desert could involve the training of government, non-government and industry staff. This would, nonetheless, need to avoid being one-off professional development programs. Instead:

... such training would ideally take place over a longer-term basis, to allow for reflection, dialogue and deliberation about practice in between training sessions in a community of practice. The need for this approach in organisations that interface with Aboriginal culture in Australia is well documented (for example, Cowlishaw 1999, Howitt 2001, Behrendt 2003). This training was recognised by service providers themselves as a prerequisite of a relational approach, seen to be necessary for the building of productive relationships between service providers, and between service providers and Martu people. [It would] be aligned to existing initiatives approaching cross-cultural awareness, and would aim to break down stereotypes, allowing alternative boundaries of Martu identity to be created as defined by Martu people and new connections to be formed founded upon these identities. Langton (1993) states that Aboriginal identity is a “field of inter-subjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation” (p. 33). McIntyre (2003, p. 311) imagines in a similar context in Alice Springs the creation of “shared spaces that respect lidminal differences”. In the Western Desert, respect of difference is a critical aspect in building long-term relationships towards improved service outcomes. (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 14)

The personal development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, and the social development of their communities, are intimately tied to the health of the Indigenous sector. Aboriginal public policy is currently formulated against a backdrop of public commentary on ‘dysfunction’ and social collapse in remote Aboriginal communities (e.g. Sutton 2009). Indigenous sector organisations offer an important antidote. They are the institutional framework of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander civil society and at the same time the principle means of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civic engagement with the wider world. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the remote areas, do not achieve their understanding of civic engagement with the wider society from schools or through the media, but through engagement with their local organisations. They have developed sophisticated practical understandings of the benefits of participatory engagement through the election of office holders and through holding office in community service organisations, and have also acquired specific skills in governance. Good governance skills have broad applicability as they embrace issues of probity in the conduct of directors and their organisations. Balanced against this is a sophisticated understanding of the need for representation of constituencies and adaptation to cultural protocols.

Wider still, participation in Indigenous sector organisations has enabled an understanding of governments and their bureaucracies and the development and implementation of policy. At the local and regional level Indigenous sector organisations have developed valuable relationships with other citizens as well as with service agencies such as the police, the judiciary, health workers and educators. Governing board members also commonly develop expertise in the particular subsector that their organisation services, such as health, education or native title.

Services would benefit from local organisations that are trusted, legitimatised, respected and supported by government. This does not come easily. But the Indigenous sector poses a problem for any government. Government is clearly in need of the positive attributes which the Indigenous sector shares with other third-sector organisations, such as local wisdom, community credibility, expertise acquired through practice, and not least the willingness of its staff to work for less material reward and under more difficult conditions than public sector staff (Dwyer et al. 2009, pp. 41–42). Yet the pool of individuals and organisations that have these attributes is the same as that denigrated and regarded with suspicion at the political level of government. This mistrust must be turned around. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are the hidden ingredient for the success of Government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander development objectives. The strategic importance of the sector as a whole is unrecognised in the government policy process, and the individual services that comprise the sector are undervalued. It is a complex sector, and with more support could make a wider contribution to the public good.

In the Western Desert, our research has shown the value and need for long-term funds to be committed to non-government organisations. 'Often, individuals within these organisations spend considerable time accessing funding and reporting on accountability criteria, while also performing important bridging roles not recognised by funding agencies. Two other principle strategies include the training of cross-cultural Martu facilitators and also the training of people in government, non-government and industry so as to provide necessary support for boundary spanners, within and outside the Martu world' (McGrath et al. 2010, p. 15).

Government needs sector specialists whose job it is to know and understand the workings of the services sector and to apply proper strategic rigour. Instead of a revolving door of generalist staff with program management and administration skills, effective services require the application of specialist skills and knowledge. And while technical knowledge is valuable, at the level of program management it is strategic skills for planning, design, implementation and evaluation that are most valuable, and enable an overview of the 'program cycle' and a focus on service outcomes.

9.4 Evaluation and learning

To know where we are heading, we need to know where we have been. This means that results have to be measured and a critical edge brought to assessment of performance. The discipline of evaluation should be integrated into service design following a more cost-effective approach than is currently the case. Contrasting to the general thrust of the analysis of services presented in this paper, it calls

for a simpler and standardised methodology that focuses on learning, identifying success factors, and providing advice that enables improvement. In this way, evaluations should encourage the agency being evaluated to be a proactive player rather than a defensive recipient of an evaluation. The practice of evaluation needs to become embedded in program and service design so that it becomes simply a part of the cycle of service development and implementation.

Progress in evaluation would establish it as part of a broader framework of design, planning and monitoring of remote services. One approach would be to draw on the experience of logical frameworks in international development. Logical framework planning and analysis is a technique that is well established internationally. A modified logical framework approach, one which emphasises engagement in the way defined earlier, would be an improvement to current means of monitoring remote services. It is favoured by government departments engaged in community-based development programs (AusAID, for example), multilateral aid agencies (such as the World Bank) and non-government organisations working in community settings (meaning most of them, including WorldVision, Catholic Relief Services and Oxfam). In the Northern Territory, it has been used extensively by Bushlight in remote area power service planning and was recently adopted by the Aboriginal Mental Health Worker Program to design and monitor services to clients in remote locations.

Logical framework planning involves the preparation of a planning matrix that establishes key measureable indicators for the services being delivered. These are located within a strategic framework that sets overall objectives. In the context of remote Australia, indicators could include, for example:

- performance of housing and infrastructure (costs of services, reliability, numbers of service visits)
- crime and community safety (night patrol activity, incidence of crime, etc)
- employment in service provision (local residents and external contractors)
- childcare (places available, uptake of childcare, etc).

Quantitative, qualitative and behavioural measures are included. It is important that higher level performance measures are kept in view, such as longer term service outcomes and returns on investment in service infrastructure. Managed effectively, logical framework planning provides for rigorous project design, analysis and monitoring. Conducted well, the method enables engagement by lay people and also allows for flexibility and change throughout the term of a program of work.

As an introduction to the subject, in their practical application logical frameworks are prepared and agreed to at the outset by participants in the service model, including community members and government staff. Again, the need for proper engagement is critical to ensure that the process of discussion and negotiation has substance rather than being superficial. The same group then remains involved in the monitoring from that point onwards. Typically, key staff working in service delivery will report progress on a monthly or quarterly basis against the indicators. A regular review is undertaken at six-monthly or annual intervals. This enables the design and implementation of the model to be changed in the light of progress and for indicators to be modified accordingly.

The emphasis of logical framework planning is on maintaining effective measurement and continual dialogue between key participants so as to achieve results and capture lessons which inform changes and improvements. It is not a method that somehow makes complex situations easy. Its use needs to be implemented in a way that is appropriate to the service setting and not as a short cut to deliver plans that are not properly understood or owned by local people. One challenge lies in agreeing about the indicators that determine whether a service is effective or not, which is why monitoring and evaluation requires decisions to be made at the commencement of a program or service. DKCRC, through its company Ninti One Ltd, is currently conducting a research project on monitoring frameworks for remote services.

To illustrate these points, we return to the case of the Ali Curung Law and Justice Program. This is an example where key factors were identified both by the community and by external commentators. Allen's (2001) review of Aboriginal community justice initiatives stated that the approach to addressing:

... community violence at Ali Curung has occurred both at an institutional and a community level. At the institutional level, the Ali Curung Law and Order Plan have been endorsed by ten government agencies. At the community level, the plan has facilitated an appropriate representation of different languages groups in the community to negotiate and liaise with agencies on a holistic approach to addressing community violence. The coordination for the various agencies has also increased interagency communication and effectiveness in reducing community violence at Ali Curung.

These sentiments are reflected in other documentation reviewing law and justice programs (Blagg 2000; Cairnduff 2001). The program benefited from the work of Northern Territory Government employees with a strong understanding of community development principles who applied these to working with Ali Curung people. In addition, Ryan (2003) has suggested that the effectiveness of the program was supported by a participatory planning process, a formalised agreement, coordination of agencies and service delivery at the local level, an adaptive policy environment, individual development of Aboriginal people and in-depth fieldwork time.

According to community members, the key factors in the success of the Ali Curung Law and Justice Program were:

1. control, participation and ownership of the program at the community level
2. two-way (cultural system and Australian-recognised system) or intercultural process
3. clearly articulated coordination of government agencies and their roles
4. outside support and assistance from a male and a female field officer
5. peer modelling and interaction with other communities
6. recognition of traditional decision-making processes.

This information was collected through interviews and workshops facilitated by CAT through the DKCRC. In essence, it provided a glimpse of the kinds of valuable feedback from the demand side of the service equation that ought to contribute to planning in the future. A problem in this case was that the aspects of the program that were valued locally did not align with the measures of effectiveness employed by the government, specifically on the reduction of crime. The closure of the program stemmed from a basic difference in indicators of effectiveness between providers and users.

9.5 Replication of effective service models

Government consistently underestimates its influence on the effectiveness of services through its approach to setting and measuring performance indicators. If accountability for detailed expenditure is where government agencies place most emphasis in their dealings with service providers, including Aboriginal organisations, then people respond accordingly. If, however, longer-term strategic objectives are monitored and therefore valued in the reporting required by government, this potentially produces a quite different effect on the way that services are implemented.

The same applies to the development and implementation of effective service models. Presently, there is insufficient interest shown by government agencies in understanding the key ingredients of effective desert services and ways to replicate them. Successful service models therefore become single chance events that are not repeated.

The experience of Myuma Pty Ltd demonstrates the critical factors that underpin its effectiveness as a service model, whether it can be replicated in other locations, and what this tells us about building on examples of good practice elsewhere. The following five attributes have been isolated from this analysis as critical good practice factors underlying the Myuma success story.

1. Colin Saltmere's special leadership skills in being not only able to successfully influence and negotiate in the mainstream government and business world, but also simultaneously to earn the respect of Aboriginal people by being a customary Law authority and leader in the Aboriginal world.
2. a strong lobbying process by Myuma among various industry and government sectors (mining and construction industries, state and local governments), combined with the respect of these sectors for Myuma for it having made a success of business enterprises.
3. this has resulted in Myuma becoming part of the local and regional economic market, which partly explains its capacity to secure selected and culturally modified demand service needs from the government and business sectors.
4. pre-vocational training in an Aboriginal-run and controlled work camp, which doubles as an Aboriginal service setting, and in which most cross-cultural blockages and intimidations experienced by trainees can be worked through with a trusted training team.
5. Closing the Gap: 'not just job readiness, but having jobs ready'¹⁰ for the Aboriginal trainees, again a function of Myuma's good standing in the economic market.

Further success factors identified through the research include:

- effective business strategy and gearing up, including through maintaining three business units for different purposes
- availability of key skills and competencies, including through partnerships
- a capacity to deal with all forms of Aboriginal politics
- enterprise capacity and ability to keep attracting contracts
- tendering as much as lobbying
- good management and governance
- reliable incoming goods and services despite its remote location
- strong identity and associated 'brand'
- a network of 'trusted outsiders' to provide support, advice and to 'open doors' for the Myuma Group.

It is conceivable that the key factors in Myuma could be formulated into a model for application elsewhere. The availability of individuals with the attributes of those at the centre of Myuma will be important, but the model does not stand or fall by these alone. Again, a message that comes from Desert Services that Work is that the combination of a strategic view of how services contribute to development goals, combined with sophisticated work with people on an individual and group basis would move government's contribution to services into a different domain altogether.

9.6 The path from policy to practice

The ability of government agencies to deliver against the six principles of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement described in Section 2.1. will be an obstacle to successful implementation of the agreement. In particular, the principles of Indigenous engagement and of accountability, which state that 'programs and services will have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation', call for specialist skills and knowledge that are currently scarce in the services sector.

Similarly, limitations in skills and capacity within government could lead to the application of tools and techniques for service planning that only address the need for community engagement in a way that is superficial. The implications would be that the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service

¹⁰ Pers. comm. Pauline Peel, Queensland Government.

Delivery ends up paying lip service to the need for participatory processes while many Aboriginal people and communities remain in a situation of being asked to go along with proposed changes that are not based on mutual understanding.

The crux of the issue remains the gap between policy development on the one hand and practical realities on the others. Housing reform in the Northern Territory is a good example of where recognition and understanding of Aboriginal kinship, domiciliary arrangements and spatiality has not informed housing policy. Housing design elements that readily incorporate culturally driven aspects of intercommunity mobility, such as high levels of visitation, are constrained by the need to reduce housing unit costs in order to meet the number of new houses, refurbishments and rebuilds promised (before costs were fully known) when the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program was first announced. Design constraints and reduced specifications will affect running costs for tenants and maintenance costs for asset managers.

At the same time, personal responsibility and agency demonstrated in the management of intra-community mobility that satisfies cultural norms and relieves social tensions is highly likely to be curtailed by public housing tenancy management regimes, and individuals and nuclear families will be signed up to standard NT Government residential leases, thus overlooking preferred Aboriginal household structures and intra-community mobility.

In general, policy remains firmly supply side in its emphasis, implying that all people need is access to a service for which providers will design, deliver and supply adequate information. The point of demand-responsive services, as we have seen in our research in NT locations such as Tjuwanpa, is that community members make choices in a service environment that is facilitated by government and in which local capacity and objectives take precedence over centrally determined service standards.

There are exceptions. Arguably, government agencies recognise the need to break through the dividing line between demand and supply by involving residents in service monitoring and evaluation. Our research on the Northern Territory Public Sector points to a public sector employment policy that aims to be inclusive of expressions of demand (Ganter 2010).

There is much to be gained for improved service outcomes by harnessing the advocacy and community development functions of Indigenous sector organisations. The Indigenous sector's emphasis on self-empowerment coupled with material progress is rarely achieved in the third sector as a whole (Lyons 2001, p. 38). The emphasis on advocacy also suggests a role in the formation of policy to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage: as service providers implementing policy, and as consumers evaluating the effectiveness of policy in practice (Melville 2008, p. 108), a point developed further in the next section.

For policy to be developed and implemented in such a way that good results from services on the ground have the best chance of being achieved, proper engagement between government and Aboriginal people is essential. This would enable a business-like discussion of needs, options and access to services in a way that negotiates the arrangements within resource limitations that are the reality for service providers and users.

9.7 The impact of the research

In line with its commitments to the Cooperative Research Centre Program of the Department of Science, Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, but also led by a strong commitment to converting research into tangible value for people living in desert Australia, DKCRC places emphasis on measuring the impact of its work. For its May 2010 meeting, the Board of DKCRC requested a summary of the impact of the research of this project, noting that Desert Services that Work: Demand-Responsive Approaches to Desert Settlements set out to enhance livelihoods in desert settlements through improved access to and effectiveness of services. This section describes our response to that request.

9.7.1 Products

In its second phase, covering the last two years, the research focused on services that relate to housing, although we have also worked on water, health, telephones and transaction centres. The project produced 26 formal outputs comprising research reports, working papers, case studies, evaluations, service guidelines, a computer-based service model and a video. We have integrated the contributions of three PhD students, one of whom is an Aboriginal woman, but this report is based largely on the commissioned research as the PhD projects are yet to finalise at the time of preparation of this report.

The project established strong and productive relationships with communities in four jurisdictions, in many cases providing contributions that are highly valued locally. These include training of and support for Aboriginal people, evaluations of local services and advice on better approaches to planning, and greater access to and long-term outcomes from services.

We have built the reputation of the DKCRC and its partners as a source of strategic and practical knowledge and advice on remote services. This has led to invitations for the organisation to contribute to round-table discussions with government staff, assist in advisory processes and provide commentary on draft documents produced by government staff at Federal, State and Territory levels. Most recently, we have been invited to make tender submissions for work arising from the implementation of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery.

9.7.2 Innovation and outcomes

The project has been innovative in three ways:

1. Conceptual developments: It is been vital to the impact of the project that it offers new ways of thinking about services. This has included conceptual development on:
 - the demand–supply dynamic in desert services
 - the interface between policy development and its translation into practice
 - the Aboriginal ‘service setting’
 - the role of intermediaries and ‘boundary spanners’ in working with communities
 - the identification of key ingredients in effective practice and potential for their replication
 - development approaches to service design and delivery
 - system modelling and improvement
 - selecting indicators of service performance, especially for evaluation purposes.
2. Engagement of community researchers: Community researchers are people who live in the communities that were the focus of the research. The project employed 17 community researchers in four locations of three jurisdictions. They have made important contributions to the research by providing advice and guidance on aspects of the research, enabling good communication to be achieved between the research teams and local people, and collecting data and contributing to its analysis. In addition, the value of training and supporting local people to be researchers was important as a source of employment, income and personal development.
3. User perspectives on service policy and practice: the project has developed a comprehensive understanding of the choices and priorities of service users that underpin demand-responsive services, and has described these in key reports from research in Ali Curung and Lajamanu (NT), Myuma and Dajarra (Qld), the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (SA), and Ngaanyatjarra Lands and Martu communities (WA). This work is an extensive resource on user perspectives of services that is not available elsewhere and is already being recognised by service providers as a critical contribution to their policy and practice.

In summary, the outputs of the project are:

1. a comprehensive and multi-dimensional resource on desert services that is relevant to and useable by communities, government and business
2. greater capacity and expertise to analyse service policy, issues and challenges within DKCRC, its partners and the users of the research outputs
3. practical knowledge, tools and techniques for achieving better outcomes from services
4. stronger community and government relationships
5. the potential for new initiatives in this field, especially scope for formalising the practice of community researchers, new approaches to system modelling, a national 'community of practice' in remote services and international development opportunities, especially through partnerships in desert regions overseas and in conjunction with agencies like AusAID.

9.7.3 How the work has impacted on and transformed individual groups or policy

We have identified impacts in the following areas:

- Increased awareness by service providers of different conceptual approaches: Although it is difficult to marshal evidence of direct influence, the level of engagement and interest of key government staff working on the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery and the subsequent content of that agreement, especially its emphasis on achieving a better quality of interaction between service providers and service users, indicates that the research informed that process.
- Support to communities to achieve better outcomes from services, especially in Ali Curung, Lajamanu, Dajarra and the APY Lands, but also through collaborative work with Myuma Pty Ltd, an Aboriginal service provider in Western Queensland.
- Specific contributions to improved policy and practice that have attracted interest from key agencies of the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia Governments, the COAG Working Group on Indigenous Reform, and Parsons Brinckerhoff.

Overall, the research has contributed to improved policy and practice in service planning, design, implementation and evaluation for desert people and settlements.

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