

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Challenge deficit and traditional human capital policy and program models
- ▶ Take risks and embrace innovative program design, development and implementation
- ▶ Position local aspiration, investment and voice as central to such innovation
- ▶ Support learning opportunities that are voluntary and are facilitated rather than delivered
- ▶ Increase opportunities that support individuals to choose their own economic engagement and participation
- ▶ Recognise work positions that are viewed as legitimate by family and community (and why)
- ▶ Support learning experiences and work roles that recognise the value of both local traditional and contemporary knowledge and build on the inherent strengths of individuals

Background

It is well recognised that unemployment levels are high among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in very remote Australia. Yet the Pathways to Employment project found significant local aspiration for participation in the economy and a broad interest in learning experiences that supported such engagement. Despite this, there is a current decrease in employment outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Pathways to Employment Project began in 2012 and finished in June 2016. The project was guided by the following questions:

- ▶ How do Aboriginal people who reside in very remote communities navigate their way into meaningful livelihoods?
- ▶ What kinds of work might help to support sustainable livelihood outcomes?
- ▶ What kinds of learning could support meaningful livelihood agendas, aspirations and pathways?

The methodology for this project was mixed-method and involved three qualitative case studies, census data analysis and a range of stakeholder workshops and other engagement activities.

Through these activities the project aimed to engage with the potentially different ways of being, knowing and valuing that exist between policymakers, program developers and implementers and those who shape Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' existence and lifeworlds in very remote Australia.

The Pathways research challenged a number of assumptions underpinning current pathway to employment policy, programs and practices operating in very remote Australia. The research also identified elements found to foster more successful outcomes in terms of supporting transitions to and retention in employment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in very remote Australia.

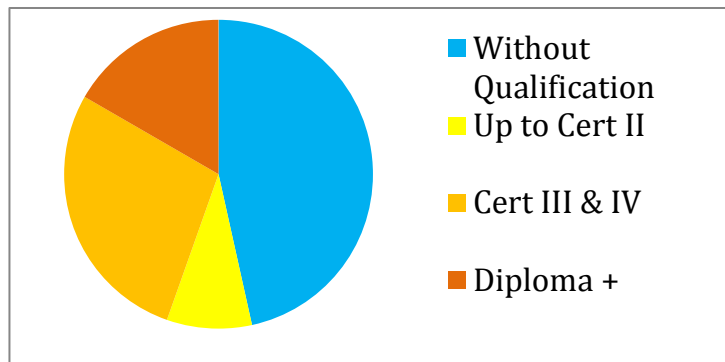


Insights and learnings

There is great environmental, cultural, linguistic and social diversity in very remote Australia. In this large geographic space, ancient and more recent histories, including overt and subtler forces of colonisation have been lived and are experienced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples individuals, families and communities in a variety of ways. All have their own unique story of survival, their distinctive knowledges and perspectives and their own sources of identity, resilience and aspiration.

The key assumptions challenged by the Pathways research are summarised below:

1. **The 'problem' of unemployment is not a lack of jobs or economy in remote Australia**
 - ▶ The research found that there were 106,437 people with jobs in very remote Australia. However, non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander workers are disproportionately represented in the labour force, being only 57% per cent of the population but 82% of the resident workforce.
2. **The 'problem' of unemployment is not a lack of education, training or qualification**
 - ▶ It is tempting to view the 'gaps' in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employment outcomes in very remote Australia as simply reflecting disadvantage, particularly educational disadvantage. Yet non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people do not have all the jobs across the board because they are better educated or trained. In fact, 46% of the whole workforce and 36% of the non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander workforce had not completed a certificate or higher qualification, with many having left formal schooling at year 10 levels. This challenges the assumption there is a clear relationship between education and employment in very remote Australia.
 - ▶ There has been a steady increase in levels of formal education and training achievement by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in very remote Australia, with more achieving years 10, 11 and 12 as well as increases in all levels of certificate qualification. Yet employment levels for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in very remote Australia are not on the same upward trend.



Make up of qualification levels of labour force in very remote Australia



3. **The lack of transition from education to employment cannot be explained simply in terms of ‘training not linked to jobs’ nor issues of ineffective service provider collaboration.**

- ▶ The research findings demonstrate that it does not matter how successful collaboration or linking is. If there is no client or local resident buy-in, outcomes remain poor.

4. **Increasing Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander economic engagement and participation in very remote Australia is not about the provision of more initiatives founded on notions of deficit and shaped by traditional human capital frameworks. Such initiatives can be a key barrier to achieving positive employment outcomes.**

- ▶ Deficit models tend to construct local strengths, assets and capitals as barriers to be overcome, or they fail to recognise them and contribute to their invisibility.
- ▶ A traditional human capital framework assumes certain motivations for engaging in training and employment; while these may hold for some people in more urban areas, the framework fails to recognise the motivations and aspirations of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in very remote Australia.
- ▶ Many current approaches to supporting transitions to employment from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in very remote Australia are not working. While lots of time, effort and money are directed at engineering pathways not many people are choosing these pathways or following them to the end.

The pathways research demonstrates that more of the same is not good enough. There is a need to reconceptualise the processes and activities for engaging people in the economy and maintaining their participation in the very remote context.

The project found that local aspirations for belonging to family, community and country can be overlooked by a system that values different goal orientations and privileges certain ways of getting there. These aspirations were also reflected in the choices people made to engage in employment, when they did, with the majority of jobs held by Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander peoples living in very remote Australia oriented towards social goals of local benefit.

Alongside this evident orientation, the project also identified a number of elements of learning and work experiences which appear to support economic engagement and employment retention.



Recommendations

- ▶ Challenge deficit and traditional human capital policy and program models.
- ▶ Take risks and embrace innovative program design, development and implementation in order to work towards better outcomes.
- ▶ Position local aspiration, investment and voice as central to such innovation and privilege this position in any linkage or collaboration process or project.
- ▶ Support learning opportunities that are voluntary and are facilitated rather than delivered.
- ▶ Increase the availability of opportunities that support individuals to make informed choices about the economy and their own economic engagement and participation.
- ▶ Recognise work positions that are viewed as legitimate by family and community (and why) and consider what would be required for other positions to acquire such legitimacy.
- ▶ Support learning experiences and work roles that recognise the value of both local traditional and contemporary knowledge and build on the inherent strengths of individuals.

For other outputs from this project, go to:

<http://crc-rep.com/pathways-work-and-enterprise/project-outputs>.

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