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# 13 Learning from experience? Getting governments to listen to what evaluations are telling them

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## **Abstract**

The road that the Council of Australian Governments travelled to get to the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery had many clear sign posts from previous interventions and experiences of what works in place-based and community strengthening approaches for remote communities. As often seems to be the case, some lessons were firmly embraced in both the policy and implementation of the new approach, whereas others have been left to languish by the road side.

The presentation will look at how evaluation findings and evidence were embedded (or not) into the Remote Service Delivery approach since 2009. It also suggests ways governments and other stakeholders can listen and learn from these experiences

This is a strong document, it is our word. But now we think that no-one in the Education Department has read our reports because now you are paying people to come and ask us what we want again. Every year you ask us and every year we tell you but you don't listen to what we say. Some community members say that you will keep asking until we tell you that we want to be Balanda, then you'll stop asking. We are not Balanda, our skin will always be black. (Submission to Collins Review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory 1999 [in Northern Territory Department of Education 1999]).

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## 13.1 Background

In December 2008, the Australian, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australian and Western Australian governments agreed to a new approach to service delivery in 29 remote Indigenous communities.

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (COAG 2008b) clearly draws on previous place-based approaches to improving social and economic outcomes for disadvantaged communities. It builds on many of the principles from these previous spatial policy practices, including the application of various principles and ideas such as social capital, social inclusion and community strengthening in a remote context. It also draws on the lessons learned from recent Indigenous trials and has borrowed from the Cape York Welfare Reform trial by recognising the need to promote behaviours consistent with positive social norms and the need to invest in capabilities and capability supports (services). It sits within the outcomes-focused Closing the Gap framework.

The Remote Service Delivery initiative builds on these ideas and practices and explicitly recognises the need to address at least some of the structural issues in the ‘social and institutional environment in Indigenous Affairs’ identified by Dillon and Westbury (2007, p. 203). The recent remoteFocus report reinforces these points and calls for more sustainable approaches to the governance, policy development, service and infrastructure delivery for remote Australia (Walker *et al.* 2012).

As well as the historic under-investment in infrastructure and services, the approach seeks to address in a holistic way the key interdependent foundations of Indigenous disadvantage identified by Henry (2007):

- poor economic and social incentives
- the underdevelopment of human capital and of capability in general
- an absence of the effective engagement of Indigenous Australians in the design of policy frameworks that might improve social and economic incentives and build capabilities.

A key objective of the Remote Service Delivery approach is to build individual and organisational capacity to assist in developing effective partnerships. This is to support the emphasis on enhanced engagement and ownership by communities in developing the agenda for change that is envisaged under the National Partnership.

The Remote Service Delivery approach has also taken on board the suggestion that remote Australia has many of the characteristics of a failed state (see, for example, Dillon and Westbury 2007 and Chaney 2009); namely, high levels of poverty, high

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levels of violence, inadequate services and little respect for government, and has sought to go beyond the normal responses, which have not served remote Australia well to date.

## **13.2 The policy context — key underpinnings**

The following section provides a brief and somewhat subjective overview of the lessons learned in the implementation of key elements of the policy environment that appear to have influenced the development of the Remote Service Delivery methodology, including spatial, social policy, social inclusion, community strengthening and community development approaches.

It is worth noting, however, that much of the genesis of these debates and the associated research have focused on urban, or at best regional, locations (perhaps due to the European antecedents of these issues), with limited effort applied to developing specifically remote place-based policy and program models in the Australian context.

### **Spatial approaches**

At its simplest, a place-based approach to planning, policy design or program delivery is ‘a collaborative effort to address complex socio-economic issues through interventions defined at a specific geographic scale’ (Cantin 2010).

A policy focus on place, rather than on people, was first considered in the 1960s (Winnick 1966) and has since been the source of considerable debate. It is now generally accepted that a focus on place offers the opportunity to better address complex and interrelated social, economic and environmental issues (Cantin 2010).

While the initial emphasis was largely on regional development aimed at compensating for disparities in productivity and income primarily through financial transfers (Gleeson and Carmichael 2001, Barca 2009a), more comprehensive place-based policies now appear to be gaining acceptance, particularly in the European Union (Bachtler 2010).

Within Australia, the shift towards whole-of-government service delivery to meet the needs of a geographically defined local community has been occurring since the 1970s. There was significant activity in the 1990s with the establishment of the Better Cities Program and the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The seminal work of Vinson in 1999, which clearly demonstrated the geographic distribution of concentrated pockets of disadvantage in New South

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Wales and Victoria, provided the theoretical basis for an increased interest on place-based interventions to address disadvantage. The importance of a place-based approach was recognised by the establishment of the Australian Social Inclusion Board's National Place Based Advisory Group in 2011 and the publication of a paper on governance models that work best for locational approaches to address disadvantage (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2011).

Systematic evaluation of place-based approaches has been limited; however, there are some examples in the United Kingdom and European contexts. Sure Start Local Programmes were community-based, multi-agency projects in some of the most disadvantaged areas in England which aimed to improve the wellbeing, attainments and life chances of all children aged 0–4 years in the local area and to support their families. A 2007 evaluation report (Anning 2007) found that systemic, sustainable structures in governance and management/leadership and empowering parents, children and practitioners were important success factors at the strategic level.

Further, a UK study comparing person-based and place-based policies found that policies had the greatest impact when they were individually tailored to support the most disadvantaged people with minimal complexity, reflected local needs and priorities, and were shaped by active engagement with stakeholders, including end users (Griggs et al 2008). It is worth noting that attempts to regenerate towns in the United Kingdom were most successful in places with high capacity and less successful in places where there was not strong community leadership or proximity to productive economies, although clearly differing approaches are also a factor (see, for example, McCarthy *et al.* 1997).

An Australian review of health place-based interventions (Larsen 2007) found the following success factors:

- integrated and holistic approaches
- fully implemented interventions (that is, not discontinued prematurely)
- community engagement, participation, and ownership
- focus on long-term and sustainable benefits
- objectives that are based on empirical evidence
- a good understanding by the community of the types and causes of disadvantage, the needs and resources available
- investment in early intervention and prevention.

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## Social capital and civil society

Social capital generally refers to the set of norms, networks and organisations through which people gain access to power and resources, and through which decision-making and policy formation occur (Grootaert 1998).

According to Grootaert, the broadest concept of social capital includes the social and political environment that enables norms to develop and shapes social structure. It can be understood as ‘networks of social relations which are characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity and which lead to outcomes of mutual benefits’ (Stone and Hughes 2002).

Grootaert (1998) suggested that, while government clearly has a role in promoting ‘desirable’ forms of social capital, the following principles for development should be used:

- do your homework, do no harm — it is critical to understand the existing social capital prior to developing policies and projects, by mapping ‘existing institutions, social relationships and networks’
- use local-level social capital to deliver projects — existing associations and organisations should take part in the delivery of projects, which not only has the potential to improve sustainability and reduce cost, but also to strengthen participating institutions
- create enabling environments — characterised by good governance, enforcement of property rights, competent and transparent bureaucracy and mechanisms to promote dialogue and resolve conflict
- invest in social capital — direct support to existing and emerging organisations as well as participatory processes in project design
- promote research and learning — to better understand effective approaches to achieving growth and equity objectives.

## Social inclusion

There is no generally accepted definition of social inclusion. A recent paper commissioned by the Social Inclusion Unit suggested that most definitions encapsulate restriction of access to opportunities and limitations of the capabilities required to capitalise on these, as well as references to the social and economic dimensions of exclusion (Hayes *et al.* 2008).

Barca (2009b) suggests that ‘ingredients’ of the definition of social inclusion (the capacity to reduce deprivation of capabilities) are:

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- multidimensional aspects of people's wellbeing, including all the capabilities that make a life worth living — health, education, housing, security, labour conditions, self-respect, role in decision-making, income etc — and the interdependence and interaction of these dimensions
  - both threshold (achieving a socially acceptable standard) and interpersonal (achieving social acceptable disparities) concepts of inclusion
  - both individual persons and groups
  - the process through which inclusion is achieved, with reference both to relation between private actors and the degree of democratic participation in public decision-making
  - a distinction between those features affecting a person's wellbeing that depend on his or her effort, and factors beyond his or her will (circumstances, including those that are place related).

He suggests an operational definition as:

The extent to which, with reference to a set of multi-dimensional outcomes, all persons (and groups) enjoy socially acceptable standards, and disparities among them are socially acceptable, the process through which those results are achieved being participatory and fair.

The Australian Social Inclusion Board has described the Australian Government's vision of a socially inclusive society as one in which 'all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of our society', and includes some more specific elements, including Australians having the opportunities and capability to:

- learn by participating in education and training
- work by participating in employment, in voluntary work and in family and caring
- engage by connecting with people and using their local community's resources
- have a voice so that they can influence decisions that affect them.<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, there are two particular elements of Barca's definition that are important — the concept that 'deprivation' is linked to a concept of a social norm, that may be different for different groups (see also Hunter 2008), and that a participatory and fair process for addressing social exclusion is integral to promoting inclusion.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/>.

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According to Hayes et al (2008), the main features of policy approaches to date to address social exclusion include:

- enhancing the ability of services to address multiple disadvantages (‘joined-up services for joined-up problems’)
- centralised coordination, which can be useful in setting targets and monitoring whether they are being achieved
- local coordination across government and non-government organisations to achieve an integrated approach
- partnerships between government and the non-profit sector
- approaches targeting multiple points across life cycles, from early childhood onwards, as well as strategies to arrest the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, deprivation and social exclusion
- recognising that the most socially disadvantaged and excluded often do not access conventional services, so services should target transition points (for example, leaving prison, young people leaving care)
- attempts to change attitudes, values and beliefs of those experiencing social exclusion and the wider community
- identifying the extent of the problem and underlying causes, including re-examining the evidence base to identify new solutions
- relying on data, performance measures and robust evaluation, particularly over the long term.

## **Community strengthening**

According to the Australian Social Inclusion Board (2009), building inclusive and resilient communities requires:

- understanding the community in terms of its composition, strengths, opportunities, vulnerabilities and attitudes
- embracing diversity
- promoting community leadership to set priorities and promote a sense of purpose
- building a strong and diverse local economy
- building strong networks and support
- recognising the role of the physical environment and infrastructure.

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Key factors underpinning successful community strengthening programs include clearly defined and agreed goals and strong local ownership and leadership, backed by sustained government investment in the social and physical infrastructure priorities identified as important by local communities (Wiseman 2006). Also critical are appropriate resources, a strong ‘third sector’ (providers with strong governance and organisational capacity), skilled staff, high levels of trust between all partners and clear, tangible benefits.

Martin (2005) emphasises the importance of community organisations in the strategic engagement of communities with governments:

... effective, appropriate and accountable Aboriginal organisations have a crucial role to play, for it is such organisations that can assist Aboriginal people to engage more strategically with the dominant society using a wider range of options over which they can exercise a degree of control than if they were dealing directly as individuals with government, and to achieve ends that are in keeping with their own aspirations.

Community strengthening is therefore not just a different means of delivery, but requires changing the way government works and changes to the traditional community engagement approach. As noted in Cavaye (2004), governments need to move from the mindset of ‘we are from the government and we are going to engage you’ to valuing and investing in relationships at the local level.

## **Community development approaches<sup>5</sup>**

The experience of international development organisations such as the World Bank, World Vision and Oxfam<sup>6</sup>, as well as findings from the social health literature, provide strong evidence that a community development approach can lead directly to improvements in life outcomes for Indigenous peoples by effectively addressing health issues and increasing individual and community empowerment (Campbell *et al.* 2007). While there is considerable conceptual ambiguity surrounding community development notions such as ‘empowerment’, the literature identifies several key success factors for community development interventions in Indigenous settings, including:

- focusing on strengths not deficits
- developing a deep understanding of the local context and history

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<sup>5</sup> This section draws on the *Six monthly report of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services – September 2010 to March 2011*.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.worldbank.org/cdd](http://www.worldbank.org/cdd), [www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au) and [www.transformational-development.org/](http://www.transformational-development.org/). See also *Principles for Development Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities* at [www.acfid.asn.au/resources/practice-notes](http://www.acfid.asn.au/resources/practice-notes).



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- ensuring stability of policy and project frameworks and long-term engagement of officers
  - ensuring community development is process-driven and outcome-oriented (outcomes are not predetermined but derive from the process)
  - ensuring two-way accountability and transparency
  - enabling community members to own and define problems and solutions, including measures of success or failure
  - employing local people and providing relevant training
  - vesting sustainability in the Indigenous organisations that will exist beyond the project's lifetime, and strengthening their capability as necessary
  - involving, but not overplaying, the role of outsiders in providing information about issues and possible action strategies together with opportunities for critical reflection
  - ensuring harmonisation and alignment between external stakeholders
  - finding ways to protect the most vulnerable (including children, women, and the disabled)
  - actively involving local groups and associations in all aspects of the community development process
  - adopting a cyclical action-learning approach to programming, with cycles of design, monitoring, evaluation and redesign
  - developing respectful partnerships between local community members and 'outsiders'
  - adequately resourcing and devolving powers to ensure a sustainable outcome.

### **Cape York Welfare Reform trial**

The Cape York Welfare Reform trial commenced in 2008 and has been extended to the end of 2013. It is a holistic reform agenda that goes well beyond welfare reform and income management through a tripartite partnership between Cape York Partnerships, the Australian and Queensland governments and the four Cape York communities (Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge) who have agreed to participate.

Underpinning the trials is the work of Noel Pearson and the Cape York Institute, which in turn draws on Amartya Sen's concept that freedom is a critical measure of wellbeing, which is constrained by the range of choices available and individual

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capability to make the right choices. Pearson (2005) suggests that three elements are required to improve wellbeing:

- a strong foundation of social values and norms
- a generous investment in capabilities supports
- a reformed set of incentives steps.

Social norms, according to Pearson (2006a) ‘come into existence when two things coincide: when the widely accepted values of a social group are matched and supported by widely adopted behaviour’. ‘Positive’ or ‘traditional’ norms are those that contribute to the wellbeing of the people holding the norms. Communities with strong positive norms actively enforce a socially beneficial standard of behaviour.

He contends that the difficulty in many Indigenous communities is not the dysfunctional minority, rather it is that the communities are no longer ruled by positive social norms — there has been a shift to neutral or non-judgemental norms which ‘can no longer resist the development of deviant behaviours amongst individuals and subgroups within their midst’.

While the individual is clearly a significant focus in the model, government has a significant role to play in providing an enabling environment for the development of individual capabilities (for example, education and enforcing social order) and removing perverse incentives (for example, the current welfare system). Pearson also suggests that we also need to address what he describes as a structural obstacle to Indigenous responsibility: ‘the inability of Indigenous people to make the institutions of government power work for the benefit of our people’ (Pearson 2006b).

Further, he sets out the prerequisites for sustainable economic development (Pearson 2006b):

- incentives for people to benefit from work
- incentives for people to be educated and healthy
- good governance
- access to financial capital to build assets
- good infrastructure
- social capital/order (respect, trust, accountability and enforcement of law)
- protection of property (legal protection of individual ownership).

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### 13.3 The policy context — Indigenous policy approaches

Australian governments have been testing ‘new approaches’ to addressing Indigenous disadvantage for more than ten years, particularly since the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Indigenous affairs is largely characterised by a litany of reports and strategies, but implementation failure. Additionally, in many cases, implementation has been limited to pilots and constrained by poor resourcing and coordination between governments and ineffective engagement with communities (Henry 2007).

The involvement of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) since the early 2000s has opened up the possibility of approaches which cut across levels of government. In November 2000, COAG agreed to ‘an approach based on partnerships and shared responsibilities with Indigenous communities, program flexibility and coordination between government agencies, with a focus on local communities and outcomes’ (COAG 2000).

By 2004, COAG had begun to take a more active role in this area. The COAG trials (see below) were agreed to in April 2002, and the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators*’ reports were commissioned to ‘help measure the impact of changes to policy settings and service delivery’ and to measure progress (COAG 2002). The June 2004 meeting agreed to new National Framework Principles for Government Service Delivery to Indigenous Australians, which would underpin overarching bilateral agreements on ‘new arrangements for Indigenous affairs’ between the Australian and State and Territory governments (COAG 2004).

In July 2006, COAG committed to a ‘long-term generational commitment’ to overcome Indigenous disadvantage (COAG 2006). The current Closing the Gap agenda evolved over the following two years, with the November 2008 meeting announcing the six targets and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, which ‘captures the objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance measures and benchmarks that all governments have committed to ... in order to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage’ (COAG 2008a).

We outline below the main findings of the evaluations of four key approaches during the evolution of the Closing the Gap agenda — the COAG trials, Shared Responsibility Agreements/Regional Partnership Agreements, Communities in Crisis and Indigenous Coordination Centres. These have been selected because the key elements in all of these were engaging directly with communities, sharing responsibility and better coordination, or whole-of-government approaches.

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There is no doubt that a key influence throughout is the finding in the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (see, for example, Cornell and Kalt 1998) that Indigenous tribes with greater decisionmaking powers experience less poverty and higher levels of economic development. As stated by Henry (2007):

Policy reforms are more likely to be successful where they are informed by those affected — those who are uniquely placed to understand their own needs and preferences. More than that, the opportunity to participate in policy development is, like education and good health, a development outcome in itself, contributing directly to higher levels of wellbeing.

## **COAG trials**

The synopsis report of the evaluations of the trials (Morgan Disney 2006) found that the trials did improve relationships and intergovernmental effort and, where staff and community representation was relatively constant, increased levels of trust between all government and community partners. However, the report identified a number of challenges, including:

- lack of shared understandings — there was some confusion over the trial objectives and the emphasis on working in new ways was not consistently supported
- developing effective, respectful relationships — some government officers did not have sufficient understanding of Indigenous communities and culture, and some Indigenous leaders did not have enough understanding of government processes and culture
- capacity gaps — both within government to work in whole-of-government ways, and within the community in relation to community governance and engagement with government, exacerbated by high turnover of staff and community representatives
- systemic issues — it took time to understand the supports and mechanisms needed to foster whole-of-government work and shared responsibility, which resulted in frustration and efforts outside the framework which undermined confidence and trust.

One of the key lessons identified was:

Solutions should be responsive to local circumstances and be within the parameters that make a whole of government, as opposed to single agency, initiative. Flexible approaches need to be applied which reflect the individual circumstances of communities, the nature of the issues facing communities, and the developmental status

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of intergovernmental and cross sectoral relationships. There cannot be a one size fits all approach.

### **Shared Responsibility Agreements/Regional Partnership Agreements**

Again, the key issues identified with the implementation of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)(Morgan Disney 2007) include:

- lack of shared understanding — of the nature of the program and a lack of ownership across government
- limited capacity of staff and communities — with respect to project management, working in a whole-of-government way, and lack of leadership
- lack of flexibility of funding — including local delegations and the development of single funding agreements and single reporting across the funding commitments agreed to achieve outcomes for communities.

The evaluation also identified the need to share what has been learnt from good practice and the need for more strategic thinking on simple effective indicators and outcome measures.

### **Communities in Crisis**

The evaluation of Communities in Crisis (SGS Economics and Planning 2007) found that there was a strong focus on governance and administration issues in selecting communities for inclusion, and that this was at the expense of other areas such as physical infrastructure, health services, education services and economic security and development. The evaluation found that more targeted selection of intervention sites may have resulted in better outcomes.

In seeking to address the crisis, the main responses addressed issues relating to governance, essential municipal services and ongoing capacity development. While these are all important, the evaluation found that a deeper understanding of crisis and its causes may have resulted in a more comprehensive, broadly focused, collaborative and better resourced response (SGS Economics and Planning 2007, p. 19).

One of the key findings on implementation related to the need for an overarching plan to direct and guide ‘the resources and actions of “all-comers” to the Indigenous development task’. The evaluation also noted that ‘disjointed and competing plans, programs and projects are more likely to sustain crisis than resolve it’.

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In terms of supporting processes, the key findings were:

- Formal consultation was missing in the design of the policy and was of variable effectiveness in engagement during implementation, resulting in a loss of momentum and ‘diminished community understanding of, involvement in and faith in interventions’.
- The lack of a binding overarching implementation plan was a major limit to genuine coordination.
- The absence of baseline community profiles limited the effectiveness of the evaluation of outcomes.
- Broader performance measures are ‘not subtle enough to guide and measure short term, discrete efforts’ and practical ‘intermediate’ or transition measures that link to the higher level framework are required.

The evaluation recommended that intervention policies for the development of Indigenous communities should:

- recognise the need for a long-term development approach
- understand the transitional nature of development
- understand the role of external versus local influence
- understand the five foundations of stable development (governance, physical infrastructure, health services, education services, and economic security and development)
- pursue the qualities of planning, equity, empowerment and sustainability.

In implementing this approach, it was recommended that attention be applied to planning for stable development, applying flexibility in the right place and coordinating the right knowledge and expertise.

## **Indigenous Coordination Centres**

The final report of the evaluation of Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) (KPMG 2007) found that:

- building partnerships with Indigenous communities and organisations was a core strength of ICCs
- the implementation of whole-of-government collaboration required significant improvement in information sharing, flexible funding solutions and co-location of the appropriate line agency staff

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- the implementation of flexible and responsive solutions to community-identified priorities required clearer and more flexible funding solutions and better accountability processes (including reporting, delegations and assessment processes and reductions in red tape).

Subsequently, Dillon and Westbury (2007, p. 203) advocated strongly for:

... appointment of government officers to live and work in remote regions and communities with a broad functional responsibility and effective mandate to represent government, act as a conduit for information flows between government and community both upward and downward, facilitate increasingly complex strands of service delivery in co-ordinated and cost-effective ways.

### **13.4 Were the lessons learnt?**

It is timely to reflect on whether the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery has learnt from the previous approaches it clearly draws on. In addition, it will be important to assess whether the Agreement has been implemented effectively, to ensure that decisions on successor arrangements are informed by the lessons learned since 2009.

Some lessons were firmly embraced in both the policy and implementation of the new approach. They included the need to: ensure a strong government presence on the ground (the ‘single government interface’); establish formalised coordination and accountability mechanisms (boards of management); have a shared community plan of local priorities (Local Implementation Plans); and allocate funding to build the capacity of local leaders and organisations, cross-cultural competency of government officers and collect baseline information; and build in evaluation opportunities (formative and summative).

However, as is often the case, there is a gap between policy intent and implementation reality. Some of the lessons that have not been effectively implemented to date include:

- adopting a strengths-based approach rather than singular focus on deficits and understanding how best to foster positive social norms
- implementing a whole-of-governments approach at all levels (incorporating local governments and full involvement by all agencies, not just Indigenous affairs agencies)
- paying adequate attention to building the capacity of staff on the ground (to operate in partnership with community members and organisations)

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- understanding cultural maps to ensure right community decision-makers are at the table
  - implementing flexible funding based on needs and outcomes rather than programs
  - better coordinating programs capable of delivering multiple policy objectives (for example, infrastructure)
  - delegating decision-making closer to the ground
  - incorporating key performance indicators that inform implementation planning, not just plans that too often are one off
  - understanding cultural maps to ensure that the right decision-makers are at the community governance table
  - learning from experience so that formative evaluation opportunities are not missed.

## 13.5 Conclusion

Based on the experience of the Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services since 2009, governments in future need to:

- ensure summative evaluations are early enough so that they can influence the next iteration of the policy and program frameworks
- embed formative evaluations so that they can be responsive to the lessons being learnt, which would then prove to officers that it is worthwhile to change the way they work in response to circumstances
- provide meaningful feedback on evaluation findings to Indigenous communities and other stakeholders
- where appropriate, respond directly and quickly to findings that suggest structural change to policy and/or institutional arrangements is needed
- embed evaluation findings in policy frameworks and budget decision-making
- equip officers with the capability to implement the policy framework (including an enabling environment).

The recent review of the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report (ACER 2012) has some very useful recommendations (greater focus on strengths, evidence-based case studies, place-based/tailored information, linkages between indicators, and improved engagement with communities and policymakers). These themes and issues are not new but they highlight the need for a more systematic



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approach by governments, researchers and, most importantly, Indigenous communities and their leaders in building on key reforms such as the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery.

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