Education, Training and Indigenous Futures

Research Summaries
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Reference No. 7

Summarising: Altman (2006), *In search of an Indigenous Outstations Policy for Indigenous Australians*
Responsibility for the preparation of this research summary rests with the authors of the MCEETYA report *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures: CAEPR Policy Research 1990–2007* and not the original author(s) of the summarised material.

Title of Research:
In search of an Indigenous Outstations Policy for Indigenous Australians.

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
J.C. Altman

Time period:
2001 (data) – 2006 (paper preparation date)

Geographic location:
Remote areas of Australia

Methodology:
An analysis of statistical information about small Indigenous communities derived from the ABS 2001 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS), as well as other statistical information from both the ABS and other research studies.

Aims:
The paper aims, within the context of contemporary Indigenous policies, to:

- Provide details of outstations across Australia, including number, location and numbers of people involved.
- Analyse the two issues of service delivery and economic viability of outstations; and
- Suggest future directions for the development of policies relevant to Indigenous outstations.

Selected findings and insights:
In 2001 there were 991 discrete Indigenous communities or 'outstations' spread across Australia with a population of 100 or less persons:

- The total population living in these 991 small communities was 19,817 and the average size was 20 persons;
- About 55% were located in the Northern Territory, 23% in Western Australia and almost all of the remaining in Queensland (10%), South Australia (8%) and New South Wales (3%);
- Of these 991 small communities, some 868 (87%) were in very remote localities and 86 (9%) in remote localities
- Almost all outstations were linked to larger communities and Outstations Resource Agencies.

In addition, there were 225 other discrete communities with population sizes of over 100, but these only amounted to 88,268 persons with an average size of 392 persons.
Numbers of persons associated with outstations varied markedly across time. For example, one study cited in this paper shows that:

- in 1998, when differentiating between minimum, maximum, usual and effective populations at outstations there were between 13,500 and 32,500 residents at about 1,000 outstations Australia-wide.

In terms of infrastructure, the paper found that there was little difference in housing and associated infrastructure was not significant.

In contrast, access to education was very different between large and small communities, although note that the only data available for defining 'small communities' was for populations less than 50 persons (Note: not of 100 persons or less as in the information provided at the first finding).

- 27% of communities with less than 50 persons had primary schooling available within 10 kms of their outstation; this compared to 93% of communities greater than 50 persons having primary schooling available within 10 kms;
- 12% of communities with less than 50 persons had junior secondary schooling (up to Year 10) available within 10 kms of their outstation; this compared to 50% of communities greater than 50 persons having primary schooling available within 10 kms; for secondary schooling up to Year 12 the respective proportions were 8% and 28% having ready access.

In a comparison of socio-economic indicators for outstations and townships in Western Arnhem Land, this research found that education levels were higher in townships than outstations (22% compared to 9% having completed Year 10 or higher) but employment was higher on outstations compared to townships, possibly due to higher levels of involvement in CDEP on outstations. Furthermore, preliminary research did not support the view that employment prospects for Indigenous people improved as an individual moved up the settlement hierarchy.

Educational implications:
The provision of education to school-age children and adolescents in outstations is a particular challenge to educational authorities due to:

- Small numbers of 'potential' students living on each outstation, which increases service delivery costs;
- Building and maintenance of facilities;
- The application of a pedagogy and curriculum appropriate to a wide age range of students;
- Seasonality, which influences the numbers residing on outstations, with often a movement into town centres during the wet season;
- Difficulties of recruiting well-trained and culturally sensitive teaching staff; and
- Addressing the multiple purposes of education among these small communities.

The development of effective service delivery to Indigenous outstations is a research priority for educational authorities in the context of government policies of service delivery to outstations.
Relevance:

Introductory Topic: The Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education
  - Access to post-compulsory schooling, training, employment and higher education
  - Pathways and strategies for remote locations

Related papers:
