Education, Training and Indigenous Futures

Research Summaries
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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:
Preliminary analyses of access to education and discrete Indigenous communities in Australia, 2006

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
A. Fordham

Time period:
2006

Geographic location:
Urban, regional and remote Australia

Methodology:
An analysis of the statistical information collected by the ABS 2006 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aims:
To provide updated information about the profile of discrete Indigenous communities, with particular reference to:

- number and size of discrete communities; and
- access to education services.

Selected findings and insights:
This overview paper provides a summary of survey findings presented by the ABS in their 2007 publication of the outcomes of the 2006 CHINS. Key findings of the survey in relation to the number and population of discrete communities were that:

- There were 1,187 discrete communities identified in 2006, slightly down from the 1,216 identified in the 2001 survey. Of these 1,187 discrete communities:
  - some 1,008 were in very remote areas with the large majority (767) comprising a usual population of less than 50 persons.
  - A further 104 discrete communities were located in remote Australia and, again, the large majority (71) comprised less than 50 persons.
  - There were 92,960 Indigenous persons living in discrete communities in 2006, down from 108,085 persons in 2001. Of these 92,960 persons:
    - some 69,253 lived in very remote Australia; and
    - a further 11,237 lived in remote Australia.
The overall decrease in numbers of discrete communities and their populations since 2001 was probably due to closure of outstations and migration to town centres or other outstations or due to homelands no longer being supported.

**State and Territory differences** existed in the numbers of discrete communities and populations living in those communities, as shown in the accompanying figure, taken from CAEPR Discussion Paper No.286/2007.

- The largest number of discrete communities was in the NT with 641 communities, followed by Western Australia with 271 discrete communities and Queensland with 124 discrete communities.
- The largest numbers of Indigenous people living in discrete communities were in the NT with 41,681 persons, followed by 27,446 in Queensland and 13,838 in Western Australia.

**Mobility** was identified as an issue for adequate infrastructure provision in discrete communities:

- In 2006 some 248 or 21% of discrete Indigenous communities reported a population increase for two weeks or more over the 12 months prior to the survey, with about one-third reporting increases in size similar to or greater than their normal populations – due largely to cultural purposes.

In 2006, 245 discrete communities reported having a primary school in the community. In terms of secondary school provision:

- 49 discrete communities reported having a secondary school up to Year 10 and 40 reported having a secondary school up to Year 12 located within the community. Interestingly some 14 communities reported having Year 10 provision in 2001 and now Year 12 provision in 2006.

However **access to education** continues to be an issue for many discrete communities, and particularly for access to secondary education. Even among larger communities this was the case:

- there were 21 discrete communities of 500 or more persons where there was no Year 12 secondary school within 25 kms. For 19 of these communities there was no Year 12 secondary school within 50 kms; and
- there were nine discrete communities of 500 or more persons where there was no Year 10 secondary school within 25 kms. For eight of these communities there was no Year 10 secondary school within 50 kms.

At State and Territory level, access was an issue for most discrete communities, as indicated by access to secondary school provision:

- 841 discrete communities (78%) were at least 25 kms. from the nearest Year 12 secondary school provision, and of these 744 were 50kms or more away from a Year 12 secondary school. Of the 744 communities at least 50 kms from a Year 12 secondary school:
  - 428 were in the NT, 169 in WA, 98 in Queensland and 45 in SA.

Access to secondary education is that much more difficult in the case of small communities. Of the 1079 discrete communities for which information is available on secondary school access, some 764 comprised less than 50 persons and 315 had populations greater than 50 persons.

- Of the 764 communities with less than 50 persons, 659 communities (86%) were located at least 25 kms from a Year 12 secondary school and 583 (76%) were located at least 50 kms from a Year 12 secondary school; and
- Of the 315 communities with 50 persons or more, 182 communities (57%) were located at least 25 kms from a Year 12 secondary school and 161 (51%) were located at least 50 kms from a Year 12 secondary school.
Educational implications:

This overview paper highlights the continuing issue of access to education, particularly secondary education, for young people living in discrete communities. It challenges educational authorities to consider alternative models of service delivery than those currently available so that quality secondary education can be made available in a cost effective manner. There are a number of options that warrant investigation, including development of a greater range of boarding schools (there are some excellent models currently being developed) and on-line delivery by specialist teachers to learning centres and supported by tutors, as occurs in some similar overseas settings. In some areas, there may be a need for new secondary facilities in communities or regional centres serving them, as is occurring in the Northern Territory. [service delivery]

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

Related papers:


Figure: Indigenous Discrete Communities, 2006 (ABS Cat. No. 4710.0)