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Summarising: Sullivan (2005), *Strange Bedfellows: Whole-of-Government Policy, Shared Responsibility Agreements, and Implications for Regional Governance*
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:
Strange Bedfellows: Whole-of-Government Policy, Shared Responsibility Agreements, and Implications for Regional Governance

Research Publication:
CAEPR-Reconciliation Australia ICG Project Workshop Report 2005

Name of Researcher(s):
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Geographic location:
Australia-wide.

Methodology:
This paper reviews 43 Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRA) that had been signed at the time of preparing the report as well as critically analysing associated SRA policy.

Aims:
The purpose of this paper is to review the implementation of whole-of-government processes and the Commonwealth government policy on SRAs.

Selected findings and insights:
The paper identified four major impediments to governments effectively working with Indigenous communities:

- duplication among government agencies in consulting communities about development;
- lack of collaboration across agencies to develop multi-faceted solutions;
- conflicting views over Commonwealth and State responsibilities; and
- mismatch of skills to responsibilities – non-government organisations (NGOs) had grassroots knowledge but little power whereas government agencies tended to be more responsive to internal administrative requirements than external factors.

Shared Responsibility Agreements
SRAs were based upon discretionary funding and not considered a replacement for core or mainstream funding. However there did not appear to be any direct correspondence between what was to be provided from discretionary funding and what was to be provided from core funding:

- What was discretionary in one community may have been required for normal human existence in another.
There was also a tension between SRAs being viewed as a discretionary grants program and the potential for them to develop into a complex whole-of-government multifactorial intervention.

This paper argues that greater clarification was required as to the purpose of SRAs and notes that, unlike other grants programs, the obligation for a particular behaviour was not functionally linked to the benefit provided:

- In the past a vehicle was provided for a purpose and accountability would have been in terms of achieving that purpose; however in the case of a SRA its provision could be linked to something quite unrelated, such as community provision of a school breakfast program to increase attendance or improve health.

The paper points out that SRAs offered an advantage in terms of a Commonwealth agency (Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination) being able to negotiate with other Commonwealth and State government agencies to develop a package of assistance, including both discretionary and mainstream program assistance. There were however disadvantages in that:

- The SRA was a blunt instrument and there was no cultural precedent for Indigenous leadership to enforce compliance in most Indigenous communities.
- SRAs were not a good substitute in which to engage the community in their own cultural change on a daily basis with the involvement of skilled development workers.
- It continued a grant dependency culture that was inconsistent with the idea of self-determining programs.
- Success of SRAs was dependent on provision of satisfactory levels of education, health, transport and other services, and was therefore dependent on whole-of-government coordination, which may not be delivered through or alongside an SRA.
- SRAs may have addressed only one problem or issue and in a piece-meal fashion rather than a more holistic approach being taken. It may have also presented unintended consequences, which were not always be positive.

Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs)

The paper identifies the key stakeholders in RPAs, especially the role played by non-government organisations in Indigenous affairs:

- An intricate network of Aboriginal owned and controlled service organisations in the fields of health, legal services, land and heritage management and protection, education, arts and media.

Such networks were required to set planning priorities for the integrated delivery of government services and gain cooperation and agreement from Indigenous stakeholders and their constituents to ensure effective implementation. However the paper notes that there may be no single polity in a region, there could be many and with overlapping membership:

- legitimacy was not only determined by locality but also context, and for this reason regions were not readily identifiable. Geospatial definition of regions may not have taken account of cultural and social groupings which raises implementation issues.
Such complexity in organisational and cultural networks could be found throughout Australia, though there are significant differences from region to region. As the paper warns:

- Suspicion, jealousy, or simple non-alignment existed in Aboriginal regions as much as it did between government departments and jurisdictions.

The paper concludes with highlighting the benefits of the new arrangements:

- mainstreaming Aboriginal services, potentially tapping into the skills and funding base of non-Indigenous government departments, couples with the intention to streamline and coordinate services across departments and jurisdictions; and

- recognition of the need for cultural change and development of culturally appropriate procedures with government agencies and governance structures.

Educational implications:

This critical analysis of SRAs and RPAs is essential reading for senior education departmental officers, including those in Indigenous Coordination Centres, as it teases out the many issues that will impact on the effective implementation of these new Indigenous service delivery strategies.

Relevance:

*Domain 2: School and Community Educational Partnerships*

Educational partnership agreements and Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs)

Related papers: