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Summarising: Taylor (2004), *Social Indicators for Aboriginal Governance: Insights from the Thamarrurr Region, Northern Territory*
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:
Social Indicators for Aboriginal Governance: Insights from the Thamarrurr Region, Northern Territory.

Research Publication:
CAEPR Research Monograph No. 24 2004

Name of Researcher(s):
J. Taylor

Time period:
The report was finalised in 2004, drawing upon the most up-to-date information available at the time, which was generally 2003 information.

Geographic location:
The analysis is undertaken in the Thamarrurr Region (NT) which is the region surrounding Wadeye, a largely Aboriginal township of some 2000 people.

Methodology:
This study analyses data provided from relevant Commonwealth and Northern Territory government departments, as well as the Thamarrurr Regional Council.

Aims:
The aim of this study was to develop a set of social indicators relevant to those aspects of social and economic life in the region which are subject to policy intervention. In so doing the study sought to establish 2003 baseline information about a range of indicators related to family composition and mobility, labour force participation, education and training, health and housing and involvement with the justice system.

The study also sought to encourage forward thinking by developing population projections through to 2023.

Selected findings and insights:
The 2003 population of 2034 (est.) was concentrated at the younger end of the age pyramid, with the infant (0-4 years) population being almost 20% of the total population and those of school-age (5-15 years) being 30%. In addition, those in the transition years from school to work (16-24 years) were 20% of the total population.

While nuclear families existed, the functional basis of social organisation was the extended family group, 90% of the region’s population being organized into 60 family groups of 10 or more persons, generally spread across dwellings and not equating to households, with an average size of the extended family group being 17 persons. Considerable mobility and temporary residence across the region was also noted.
Population projections for the region indicate rapid expansion across all age groups which will impact on infrastructure needs as well as requiring a significant expansion of the labour market. By 2023 the population should reach 3,833, an increase of 88.4% on the 2003 population of 2,034 persons. For example:

- The school age population (5-15 years old) was expected to rise by 82.1%; and
- Those aged 16-24 years and hence likely to be continuing secondary education, entering further education and training or directly entering the workforce were expected to rise by 69.7%.

To meet such a projected expansion of the labour force, there would need to be a doubling of the number of jobs just to maintain the 2003 level of employment, which itself was low. A quadrupling in the number of jobs would be required if parity with the rest of the Northern Territory Indigenous population is to be reached. This is the context for planning the future delivery of education and training in the Thamarrurr Region.

Participation in schooling in the region was very low. In 2003:

- while 67% of the region’s school age population was enrolled at school at the start of the school year this had declined to 56% by September, and only half of those enrolled actually attended classes. Most students attended on an irregular basis, with 82% not attending at least 50 days in the school year; and
- less than 20% of teenagers of compulsory school age were estimated to be attending classes. As a result very few school leavers enter working age with upper secondary level achievement and skills.

Participation in further education and training in the region was also very low. Using available 2001 and 2002 data:

- there was very low participation in certificate-level Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses, with 44 individuals enrolled in nationally accredited qualification courses designed to lead to a qualification specified in a national training package, and half of these were at Certificate I level. The large majority of VET enrolments were in accredited courses not leading to a qualification specified in a national training package, again mainly being at Certificate I level or at a basic attainment level not accorded a level.
- overall some 88 individuals completed courses in 2001 but about three-quarters were in short miscellaneous enabling courses with no formal certification attached.

Low secondary school attainment levels combined with low levels of VET certificate-level training resulted in those young adults of an age most likely to be entering the workforce being unable to compete effectively with non-Indigenous workers in the (limited) mainstream employment market. The study points out that:

- 45% of those not in the workforce and 35% of those unemployed were in the 15-24 years age group.

Furthermore the study pointed out that there were instances where Indigenous people holding qualifications could not find employment in those areas in which they had trained, emphasising the need for improved coordination of training provision and labour market needs in regional planning.

Detailed information is given about the health of the population, including growth assessment information on young children (<5 years) which identified some 21% as being under-weight, 10% as wasted and 20% as stunted in their growth, and relatively high morbidity rates commencing in the mid-30s age range. The paper also notes the high level of youth recidivism, with significant numbers of youth re-offending and therefore frequently coming into contact with the juvenile justice system.
Educational implications:
The skill levels of the Indigenous population are extremely low and are a limiting factor for gaining employment should any opportunities exist, or for developing business enterprises which take advantage of ‘caring for country’ responsibilities such as land and sea management. Addressing the low school enrolment rates and, for those students formally enrolled in schools, the low attendance rates would appear to be a priority for educational authorities. Similarly encouraging participation in further education and training for older students and those entering the workforce would be a priority. There are clearly both delivery and facilities costs involved in meeting this substantial challenge.

The benefit of this comprehensive regional analysis is that it emphasises the need for improved interagency coordination, involving schools, training providers, business and industry, employment agencies and local Indigenous organisations. Educational authorities are well placed to play a significant role in facilitating interagency coordination and to be a catalyst for developing educational pathways to employment.

[partnerships]

Relevance:
Introductory Topic: The Changing Demography of Indigenous Australia
Introductory Topic: The Health of Indigenous Australians
Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education
  The challenge for Pathways to training, employment and higher education
  Access to post-compulsory schooling, training, employment and higher education
  Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education

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