Capacity Building for Indigenous Governance:

International development experience of capacity development: implications for Indigenous Australia?

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Background
Capacity development is a term which has come to the fore in international development at a time when there is a significant shift taking place in official approaches to development. Despite differences in approaches to development itself, since the mid-1990s there has been strong agreement that development ‘partnerships’ between donors and recipients is critical, that people need to participate in and shape their own development, that having capable institutions is essential to achieving development outcomes, that development requires collaboration between the state and other actors, notably the private sector and civil society, and that the role of donors has to become one of facilitator and enabler. Furthermore, earlier approaches based on the idea that capacity could be ‘transferred’ from the developed countries to the developing ones through technical cooperation were seen not to have been sustainable (Nair 2003).

Partnership and participation became new catch-words to describe the ethos in which new development cooperation strategies would be worked out. Development agencies would ‘partner’ with local institutions, and local people would gain through fuller participation in planning and implementation. However, latest thinking suggests that a shift from partnership to ‘ownership’ is essential. The call for greater local ‘ownership’ of the development endeavour has been matched by the recognition that local institutions do not always have the requisite capabilities to meet the challenges they face, and it is recognized that the wider conditions in which they operate may be part of the problem (Fukuda-Parr, Lopes & Malik 2003). Thus capacity development becomes a central task in development. Capacity is defined as ‘the ability of individuals, organizations, and whole societies to define and solve problems, make informed choices, order their priorities and plan their futures, as well as implement programs and projects to sustain them’ (Nair 2003) and capacity development is the process of achieving it.

Capacity development – clarifying a concept
The terms capacity building or capacity development are used in international development circles in many different ways to apply to a host of diverse activities at many different scales from rebuilding an entire nation after traumatic conflict, to strengthening a small community based organization, and occasionally to training an individual. Inevitably, such diverse uses of the term can lead to confusion about what is done in its name and how to evaluate programs which claim to do it.

In an early paper about capacity assessment and development, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (1998) outlined the key capacities to consider at three levels:

- The broad system (also known as the ‘enabling environment’)
- The entity (a department, unit, or organization)
- The individual.

The Enabling Environment
The dimensions of capacity which may be considered here are:

- Policy – purpose and mandates of the system, including value systems
The entity
The dimensions of capacity which may be considered here are:

- Mission and strategy (e.g. including role, clients, interactions with ‘stakeholders’ and wider system, and core strategic management capacities)
- Culture/structure and competencies
- Processes (internal and external to it)
- Human resources
- Financial resources
- Information resources
- Infrastructure

The individual
- Individual’s capacity to function effectively within the entity and the broader system
- Performance/skills required for particular functions
- Accountability
- Values/ethics
- Incentives and security

Early emphasis was placed on the capacity of individuals and a major strategy was scholarships and other ‘manpower’ development approaches. The next focus was on organizations, their policies, systems and approaches to service delivery; but still the institutional framework – both formal and informal - remained constraints (DFID 2002).

More recently UNDP emphasizes that capacity development ‘takes place not just in individuals, but between them, in the institutions and networks they create – through what has been termed the ‘social capital’ that holds societies together and sets the terms of these relationships’. (Fukuda-Parr, Lopes and Malik 2002:9).

A key emphasis of capacity development is on achieving and sustaining outcomes. Many capacity development initiatives fail or have not been successfully sustained, because they have not taken the broader system or environment into account (UNDP 1998). They have focused on the individuals or the entities without sufficient consideration of their systemic context, and their relationships, and how those may affect their capacity to perform. Fig. 1 illustrates rather simplistically a community in its ‘enabling environment’ consisting of several layers of government. Not shown are private sector players who may also be very significant. The black ovals in the centre represent organisations within an Aboriginal community. Each outer layer contains many complexities, and there is usually an extensive set of interactions between players in these layers and the Aboriginal community and/or organisation(s) at the centre. In the real
world, even the very idea of a bounded and clearly defined Aboriginal community is also open to question. Whatever the limitations of this particular model, a key lesson from international development experience is to focus more attention on the enabling environment.

Fig 1 An Indigenous ‘community’ in its enabling environment

A few more conceptual distinctions. Franks usefully distinguishes between capabilities - meaning the ‘knowledge, skills, attitudes of the individuals, separately or as a group, and their competence to undertake the responsibilities assigned to them’ and capacity, as ‘the overall ability of the group or individual to actually perform the responsibilities’ (Franks 1999:52). Thus capacity depends on the size of the task, the resources allocated and the context in which it is to be carried out. Underfunded or understaffed activities will fail even where capabilities exist. In addition Horton et al (2003) emphasise that management, including strategic leadership, program and process management, and networking and linkages are also critical to turn capabilities into organizational performance.
Another distinction is between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ capacities. ‘The hard elements refer to things like personal skills, functions, structures, systems and to factors such as equipment, infrastructure and financial resources…. The ‘soft’ elements refer to less easily definable and quantifiable factors. These are often related to so-called ‘incentive’ motivational and demand factors, of a material, cultural or social nature’ (Land 2000:3). These apply at both the individual and the organizational level, as well as the broader governance environment, and research and experience indicates that they are extremely, if not critically, important (Kaplan 1999, Morgan, Land& Baser 2005).

Another conceptual consideration relates to whether capacity building is seen as a means, a process or end in itself. Thus as a means, capacity building may be designed to enable an organization to deliver a service or program defined by another agency; as a process, capacity building may be about developing the capacity to deal with constant change in the external environment; finally as an end – capacity building may be to strengthen an organisation to participate in sustainable development (Bebbington and Mitlin 1996: 7).

**Capacity Development: Lessons from recent research and experience**

The reality of capacity development on the ground is more complex than the foregoing discussion would suggest. Some interesting findings are emerging from a major study of capacity building currently being undertaken by the European Centre for Development Policy Management for the OECD Network on Governance and Capacity Development (ECDPM 2003). It involves 20 case studies which investigate how ‘organizations and systems, mainly in developing countries, have succeeded in building capacity and improving their performance’. The scale of these studies varies, from whole sectors, to major institutions and NGO networks. It is exploring the factors that encourage capacity building, how these differ according to context, and why efforts to develop capacity have been more successful in some places than others.

A preliminary report emphasizes the importance of contextual factors, the close linkage between governance and capacity development, and the salience of systems thinking to success. Thus, these researchers also emphasize that organisations whose capacity is to be built sit within a system of other organizations, whose intersection with them may help or hinder the capacity development process. This can be valuable, where a virtuous spiral of capacity building can be generated, and where networks can assist in scaling up impact. A disempowering cycle can however, constrain capacity development.

They note that capacity development does not always flow from a grand plan, but may evolve from experimentation or in a pragmatic and incremental way. They also emphasise the need for developing a balance between the ‘hard and soft’ capacities, and recognize that politics permeated all their studies, as ‘shifts in roles, power, access to resources, relationships and identities took place at all levels’ (Morgan, Land & Baser 2005: 11) Attracting attention and gaining support through ‘positioning’, and getting the right balance between ‘operational autonomy, political support, performance and accountability’ were all important in their case studies (2005:11).
A number of other relevant issues arise from the ECDPM study: leadership, legitimacy, and the relationship between capacity and performance.

While leadership is seen as critical by many writers (e.g. Hailey and James 2004), four particular qualities stand out in the link between effective leadership and capacity development. Successful leaders infuse others with positive energy even in disempowering circumstances; think strategically and creatively about capacity development as an end in itself as well as a means to better performance; use informal networks, contacts and social standing to protect the organization; and adapt their leadership style as the organization grows (Morgan, Land and Baser 2005:12).

This research also found that legitimacy can assist in developing capacity by leading to opportunities and access to resources. Most interesting, in the context of capacity building for Indigenous governance, are their findings about the relationship between formal and informal, or traditional institutions:

In many cases power and legitimacy came out of the informal and traditional rather than the modern. The change strategies that appeared most effective were able to operate well at both levels. They had ways of indigenizing techniques from the outside and modernizing traditional practices and values. Capacity development was at one level about respecting national1 values. But it was also about changing them to fit with new challenges. (Morgan, Land and Baser 2005:13)

The link between capacity and performance seems to be a complex one, but what is clear is that ‘quick wins’ in the short term are necessary to sustain capacity development efforts over the long haul, and knowing how to balance these short and long-term needs is vital. However it seems that linear inputs-outputs thinking and too much tight focus on outcomes can contribute to reduced performance.

A recent paper produced by the OECD Development Assistance Committee Network on Governance, emphasizes a number of additional points, indicating that capacity development requires:

- Clarity about purpose: capacity for what? and for whom? The broad goals must be defined by the developing country and there must be clarity about roles and responsibilities, based on a clear agreement about partnership;
- Attention to broader capacities to plan, manage, implement, and account for results as well as specific technical capacities (eg in health, education, water supply etc) – these include political capacities;
- Understanding of the political drivers for change (or blocks to change).

It also identifies a number of conditions which constrain capacity development, among them:

- Lack of effective voice, especially of intended beneficiaries;

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1 In the Australian case, ‘national’ implies ‘Indigenous’.
• Political systems with weak social capital (trust) and lack of participation;
• Fragmented government or non-credible or rapidly changing government policies, overload of reform and change initiatives, and unpredictable, unbalanced or inflexible funding and staffing (DAC Network on Governance 2005).

**Systems thinking and capacity development.**

By ‘systems thinking’ I simply mean recognizing and analyzing the system as a whole – at whatever level or scale of the system is necessary to gain an understanding of the dynamics of capacity development in a particular context.

Lavergne sees capacity development as essentially a context-specific exercise, which requires a very politically aware and strategic approach within a systems framework. He notes that a number of characteristics can make systems more dynamic, accelerating the rate of change (Lavergne 2004a). In particular, he emphasises accountability to ‘beneficiaries’, appropriate incentives, and leadership among key issues in this regard.

Pasteur and Scott-Villiers (2004) also emphasise the role of systems approaches to learning as a way of reducing the gap between rhetoric and reality in development work. In particular they draw attention to the inter-relationships between culture and values, structures and relationships, and processes and procedures.

Careful attention to the ways in which power is exercised through implicit as well as explicit rules, values, norms and behaviours appears to be tremendously important. Those who engage with people whose capacity is to be ‘developed’ have to be acutely aware of their behaviours and attitudes and how these are communicated - both personally and institutionally - if their capacity development efforts are to succeed. Recent research and reflection has highlighted that intangible ‘mindsets, vested interests and power differentials may make the biggest contribution to development success or failure’ (Lopes & Theisohn 2003:5) ²

The reality is that development is not something simply done to others. It requires new capacities and mindsets in the people and institutions interacting with those whose capacity is ostensibly to be developed. Capacity development implies two-way learning.

The systemic consequences of certain mindsets and power relationships are portrayed in a ‘vicious cycle of disempowerment’ referred to by Lopes and Theisohn (2003) in which implicit inequalities and attitudes of superiority are conveyed, in this case by donors, in relation to developing country ‘recipients’ (see Fig 2). Donor agencies confidently set priorities, plan directions and programs, and control resources. They set the standards of accountability and see poor results as confirming weak capacity in developing countries. Recipients, often lacking confidence in their own abilities, do not accept ownership of these imposed ideas, which may not reflect their priorities. They see the requirements placed on them as unrealistic and the standards as unattainable and simply resort to

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² Chris Sara’s attributes his success in turning round Indigenous achievement at Cherbourg largely to a change in mindset (see Canberra Times 13 May).
getting what they can out of the system. I see echoes of this cycle in government relations with Indigenous Australia.

**Figure 2  The vicious cycle of disempowerment**
(Source: Lopes and Theisohn (2003).

Capacity development can turn this around into a positive cycle of empowerment, when external players show respect, respond positively to local initiatives, take some risks, and allow local people to take ‘ownership’ of their own development in a partnership of growing trust, with mutually agreed standards of evaluation (see Fig 3). Above all there is a change in the dynamic of the relationship. Thus capacity development takes place in all aspects of the system, not just the developing country – or the indigenous community.
Figure 3  The Virtuous Cycle of Empowerment

Capacity development in Indigenous Australia – what has been happening at a national level?
I am going to confine my comments to national policy as time does not allow discussion of the State/Territory details as well. In relation to Indigenous Australia the term ‘capacity development’ seems to have gained currency around the end of the decade of Reconciliation. One of the Australian Government’s first actions in its efforts to build Indigenous capacity was to hold an Indigenous Round Table on Community Capacity Building in October 2000, which developed some useful principles consistent with good capacity development.

The importance of capacity building in Indigenous communities was then articulated as one of seven principles identified by the Commonwealth Grants Commission in its 2001 Report on Indigenous Funding. These developments in the Indigenous policy arena coincided with a wider debate about Australia’s welfare system. In July 2000, the McLure Report on Welfare Reform (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000)
highlighted Indigenous welfare dependence, and Community Participation Agreements began in an effort to reduce this dependency, foster local participation in decision-making, and trial new approaches to partnership and coordination across government (see Smith 2001). These seem to have been aborted less than three years' later. In June 2004 ATSIC was abolished, and under the new Whole of Government arrangements the focus shifted to Shared Responsibility Agreements.

The National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians refers only to ‘providing adequate resources to support capacity at the local and regional levels’ (OIPC 2005:51). Capacity development of Indigenous communities and organizations, to the extent it is considered, appears to be a means to an end (the delivery of services) rather than a process important to sustainable socio-economic development for Indigenous Australians, though there is really no strategy to achieve it. The HORSCATSIA Report into Capacity Building and Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities, issued in early 2005, was a useful contribution, but also remained focused on service delivery. It recognized that the mechanisms, cycles, timeframes and reporting requirements of government funding frequently jeopardize Indigenous communities’ abilities to address their needs, and said that what is required is a power shift, to enable genuine partnerships to function which reflect shared goals, shared risk, and shared power.

The other major initiative taken by governments has been the COAG trials, intended to build Indigenous community capacity to negotiate with governments, and strengthen government capacities to work in coordinated, innovative and flexible ways with Indigenous communities. The trials are operating in eight sites across Australia, in a policy framework of partnership and shared responsibility (ATSI Social Justice Commissioner 2003:222-223). There has been no independent evaluation of these trials, but anecdotal evidence suggests that there remain a number of significant barriers to governments working together in a ‘seamless’ way and sharing power (HORSCATSIA, 2004, Humpage 2005:57, ATSI Social Justice Commissioner 2005)3.

Linked to the idea of capacity building has been the parallel focus on governance, and the belief that achieving sound governance arrangements in Indigenous communities will enhance capacity, particularly where this facilitates greater Indigenous jurisdiction over matters affecting Indigenous people, where more flexible funding arrangements can be agreed, and where the structures and processes developed accord with Indigenous values and cultural systems. However Humpage asserts that this strand of thinking became focused on corporate governance of indigenous organizations which deliver services, neglecting the issue of an Indigenous order of government raised by Sanders (Sanders 2002). The ‘partnerships’ developed really focused on the bureaucratic, managerial

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3 Joint State and Federal funding is being applied in the Northern Territory for development coordinators in three new Regional Authority sites and in 6 proposed areas for community consultation. See Regional Authorities – A mechanism for engaging with Indigenous interest in the Northern Territory, Schedule 2.3 to the Overarching Bilateral Agreement on Indigenous Affairs between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Northern Territory of Australia 2005-2010.
aspects, rather than the political. International capacity development experience suggests that the political aspects need to be given much more weight.

It seems that many of the capacity ‘problems’ in Indigenous community governance stem from a disabling, rather than enabling environment or system. While there are lessons from international development about approaches to working at the ‘entity’ level – that is with Indigenous organizations or communities - such as the use of Asset-Based Community Development approaches, or the use of methods such as Appreciative Inquiry (Foster and Mathie 2001, Hall and Hammon n.d., Mathie and Cunningham 2003, Sena and Booy n.d), both of which build on existing or historic strengths and capacities, rather than focusing simply on addressing weaknesses, the most significant lessons seem to be at the systemic level. International development experience suggests that unless issues at this level are dealt with community and organizational development will always be constrained.

**Constraints to Indigenous capacity development in Australia**

There are many constraints to successful capacity development in Indigenous Australia, and I will focus on some of the broad ones here. Since capacity development is context specific, more detailed understandings and analysis are required for any particular region, community, organization or sector.

**Lack of partnership and participation by Indigenous People**

In terms of a national policy framework, there is no effective national Indigenous voice, and there is a significant lack of Indigenous participation in the policy processes currently underway. There is no clear ‘Indigenous partner’ to have ‘partnership’ with at either National or most State/Territory levels, and although some patchy post-ATSIC Regional Council arrangements have been put in place, it is not clear what powers, resources or authority they will have. They appear likely to be simply consultative bodies. There is therefore likely to be only weak ‘ownership’ by Indigenous people of the approaches currently being adopted. Capacity development experience overseas suggests this will frustrate the policy goals, because the process of gaining a mandate for them is inadequate. While some states/territories are developing new consultative arrangements, the shape of those are unclear- but there is scope for things to change.

In the absence of this, there is no process to answer the question capacity development for what? For the Australian government it appears to be largely to be a means to service delivery, and more recently, employment. The capacity development principles agreed in 2000 included ‘encouraging self-reliance and sustainable economic and social development’, but it is hard to see where these are reflected in significant policy initiatives. For Indigenous people there is a growing interest in capacity development as an end in itself – to participate in sustainable development on their own terms.

If partnership is not at national or state level, can it be at community or regional level? Here there may or may not be legitimate, broad-based representative Indigenous bodies. The definition of boundaries, the particular rights of traditional owners and historical residents, mobility of Indigenous people, and who speaks for what, or on whose behalf,
remain highly sensitive issues in many places, a legacy of colonial displacement. Yet there is precious little support to help Indigenous people resolve these difficulties and capacity development efforts cannot ignore them.

One way of overcoming this is to give more emphasis to supporting and interacting with forms of Indigenous governance which somehow bridge the traditional and the contemporary and hence have two-way legitimacy. Where there has been attention to this (eg Thamurrurr Regional Authority, Murdi Paaki Regional Council - a former ATSIC Regional body; and Indigenous planning processes within the Murray Darling Basin Commission) there seems to be greater opportunity for capacity development. But time and resources are required for such bodies or networks to emerge and rushed or under-resourced efforts will not be sustainable.

The Australian government has recently chosen to interact at very local levels with a limited number of families and communities, through SRAs. This is not in any sense an equal ‘partnership’, but is likely to result in just a simple contract arrangement for particular outcomes – a basket ball court, a vegetable garden or a petrol pump. Whether proposed Regional Partnership Agreements will offer greater scope for more genuine partnership remains an open question.

**Complex legal and regulatory frameworks**
The multi-jurisdictional legal and regulatory frameworks are highly complex – with differing levels of government, different departmental approaches, and different land tenure regimes to name some of the issues. While the current whole-of-government policy appears intended to address at least some of this, in practice there seems little resolution as yet. While the intention may be good, the change seems to have been rushed and poorly prepared for, and genuinely flexible funding seems elusive.

Thus all the capacity development constraints of fragmented government, frequent, rapid policy changes, and often inflexible funding arrangements, seem present in the Australian context and are not conducive to capacity development.

**The need for a power shift**
The issues of power remain fundamental. Until greater power and resources are shifted to Aboriginal hands – whether to communities or organizations at various levels - whatever individual capabilities there are will not be transformed into capacity. Aboriginal people are keenly aware of how power is exercised in highly unequal ways and very sensitive to the unspoken messages of interactions with governments. Accountability issues are a good example. Despite the language of ‘partnership’ which implies some sort of equality and mutuality in the relationship, in fact, Indigenous organizations/communities are now essentially contractors required to meet stringent accountability requirements, set by government - a situation in which government holds the power. This is not a situation in which agreed evaluative standards have been negotiated by partners, and in which accountability downwards to clients is seen as more important than accountability upwards to political masters. In fact, increasingly tighter controls from governments are likely to reduce program responsiveness to and empowerment of people. The power
relationships are abundantly clear, and are not helpful for capacity development. There is a distinct lack of trust both ways – Indigenous people often don’t trust governments, and governments often don’t trust them.

Resources (including human, financial, information)
The under-resourcing in Indigenous Australia is well recognized in CAEPR circles; but more specifically, capacity development itself is under-resourced and the Australian government seems to want to by-pass existing capacity in the Indigenous sector, rather than build on it. With the notable exception of ORAC, there is no resourcing for Indigenous governance capacity development, and ORAC’s mandate and role is largely confined to what I would call corporate governance of Indigenous organizations, which I see as different from the governance of communities in a broader sense. There is no institution equivalent to The Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management and Policy in the USA which Indigenous organizations and communities can call upon for assistance.

Process – including communications flows and relationships within the system
I have already referred to some of the process problems, but I will briefly mention some issues which can affect communication and relationships. Recent international research indicates that a host of cross-cultural issues can affect capacity development where there are differences in: assumptions about the locus of human value, approaches to managing change, peoples’ perceptions of the locus of control in their lives, approaches to knowledge and knowledge transfer, societal concepts about stability and hierarchy, the individual and his/her relationships to kinship networks, religious or spiritual beliefs, preferred forms of communication, timeframes, concepts, language and worldviews; each of these may affect capacity development at every level. (Alvarado 2004, Jackson 2003, Jackson and Jorgenfrei 2003, O’Leary and Nee 2001, Ospina and Hohe 2002, Pearson 2005). Some, if not many, of these differences exist in the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, and policy makers and program directors in mainstream departments will need to pay more attention to understanding them.

An illustration
Let me finish with one example of how some of these systemic issues are frustrating capacity development at community and individual levels at present – even in a situation where some Indigenous people have established Native Title and hence have access to land and resources not available to others. In his 2003 Report the Social Justice Commissioner makes the point that the current provisions of the NTA, while providing a foundation for sustainable development through legal recognition of Native Title rights, does not offer a framework for the process of sustainable development, through enabling a claimant group to discuss its own vision and goals for social and economic development, and facilitating them to resource and implement it. He recognizes that this would require capacity development of the claimant group, a process which would need considerable time, and indicates five principles which he sees as necessary for this type of capacity development:

- It must be driven by a local agenda
- It must build on the existing capacities of the group
• It must allow ongoing learning and adaptation within the group
• It requires long-term investments
• It requires that activities be integrated at various levels to address complex problems (ATSI Social Justice Commissioner 2004: 29).

The report goes on to discuss these principles, which reflect good capacity development practice, pinpointing some of the key issues and constraints in trying to put them into effect. Whilst traditional owner groups have a number of existing capacities which ought to be recognized, they may need time and assistance to develop skills to manage a development agenda in the contemporary context; the resourcing of NTRBs is limited and there is none to PBCs, which are the key bodies one might look to for leadership in capacity development with traditional owner groups. Equally, these organisations need capacity development of their own to undertake such tasks, and although some funding has been forthcoming for this, any process must ensure that traditional owner groups are empowered to determine the directions of their own development, not have it ‘delivered’ to them. The policy environment also fails to support a holistic approach to capacity development as Native Title has been excluded from early ‘whole of government’ discussions; not only must there be coordination across many levels of government and statutory bodies, such coordination must be within an overarching policy framework which supports capacity development for sustainable development. The 2004 Native Title Report discusses further a range of issues which need to be dealt with to facilitate capacity development, but notes that too often processes are reactive to timeframes of non-Indigenous stakeholders and that NTRBs do not have the resources themselves to develop the capacity of traditional owners (ATSI Social Justice Commissioner 2005).

What might be a framework for Indigenous capacity development?
Before its demise ATSIC seemed to have worked out how a range of ideas about capacity development inter-related in its capacity building framework for sustainable development, although it had not really operationalised them (ATSI Social Justice Commissioner 2004: 85). At the community level it saw a focus on individuals, families, and clan or informal groups achieved through community development approaches such as Asset-based Community Development. At the organizational level, including community Organisations, NTRBs, Local Government bodies and Land Councils, it saw capacity building achieved through a focus on governance, with a view to aligning an ‘organisation’s structures to Indigenous decision-making processes’. And at Government level, including statutory authorities, it saw capacity building occur through achieving strategic policy directions and interventions supported by whole of government initiatives. For ATSIC there were three elements to their thinking about capacity development: the first embraced a participatory people-centred approach to community development, rather than a service delivery paradigm; secondly it was holistic, and saw people’s active role in decision-making as vital; thirdly, it emphasized sustainability over a long time period. It wanted to encourage local planning systems which would be participative and empowering, contribute to sustainable development and greater self-reliance, match planning and coordination to local level needs, and link community level planning to regional planning through the now defunct ATSIC Regional Councils (ATSI Social Justice Commissioner 2004:82-88). There is much in this vision which accords
with good international development experience. But this vision does not accord with the reality of current national policy approaches and resourcing.

Conclusion

What is required for Indigenous capacity development is a significant change in the non-Indigenous systems which frame the way Aboriginal institutions and communities operate and limit their powers4. The ‘capacity to develop capacity’ has to be developed in the non-Indigenous institutions, and the political aspects need to be addressed. Capacity development is not just a technical, rational process of training, and policy reform (Lavergne 2004b, Boesen and Therkildsen 2005) although that may all be necessary. It also requires mechanisms for political dialogue between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems at all levels - mechanisms which are non-existent or at best fragmented at present. It is these intangibles, the ‘soft’ capacities, the processes, values, behaviours, networks and approaches to learning and dialogue that need more focus in the non-Indigenous system if Indigenous capacity is to be developed. The current Australian government’s capacity building focus on families and small communities suggests that the problems and solutions can be found simply at that level, whereas international development experience, which began there, has shifted further and further up the system to locate the real constraints. We need to look at how our systems are undermining Indigenous capacity development – and generate the political will and leadership to turn the disabling environment into an enabling one, which will really release and nurture capacity in the Indigenous community.

References


4 The specific details of some of these required changes have already been identified by Professor Mick Dodson AM in his paper ‘Capacity development for Indigenous Leadership and Good Governance’ given to the ‘Building Effective Indigenous Governance : The Way Forward for NT Regions and Communities’ Jabiru 4-7 November 2003.


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