

Is evaluation in remote Australia contributing to the disempowerment of Aboriginal people?



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We thank the traditional owners of this land for enabling us to share some of our experience with you

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BACKGROUND



THE CURRENT SITUATION

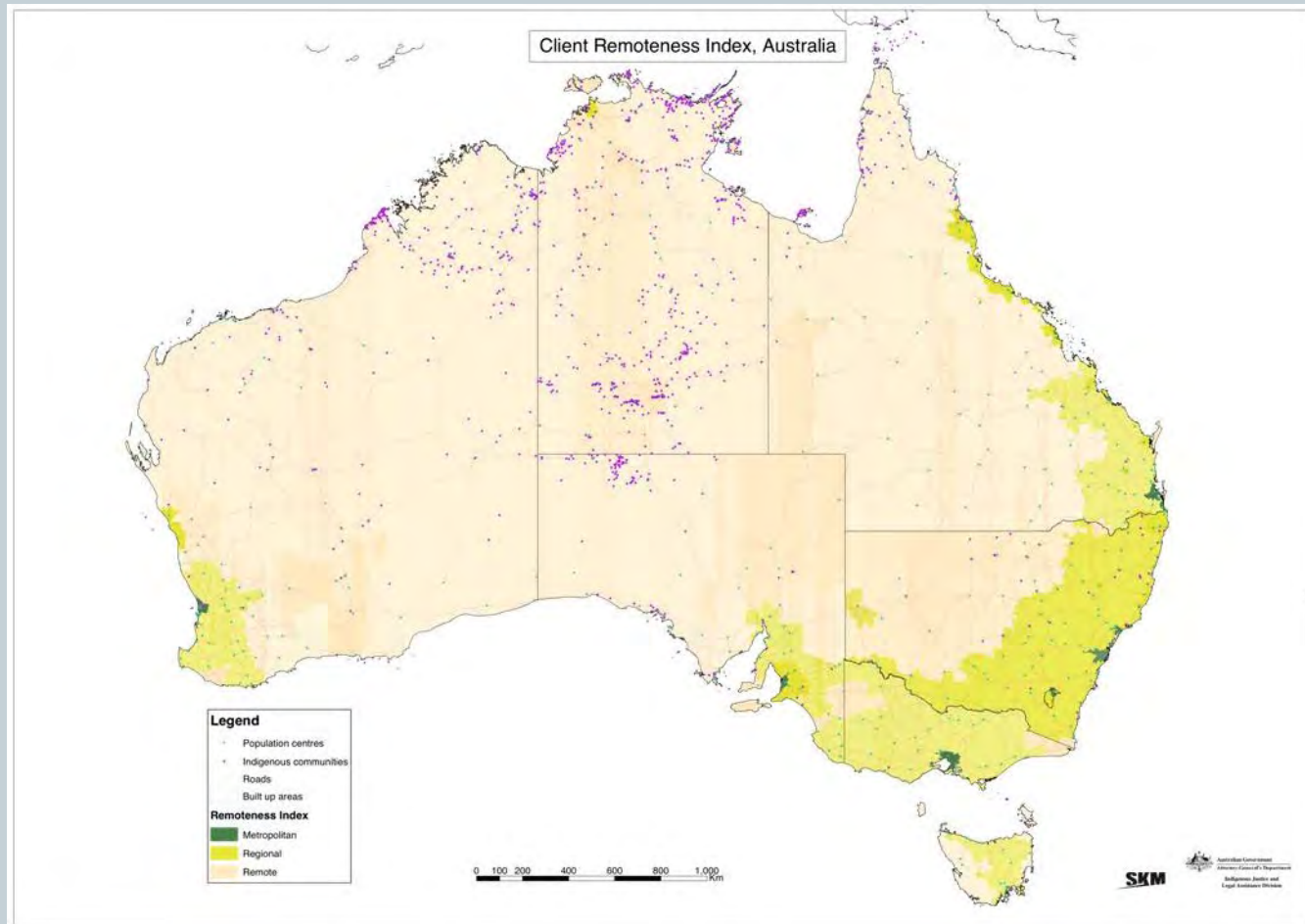
Remoteness

Northern Territory

- Highest population living in the most disadvantaged socio-economic areas
 - (34 % compared to 13 % nationally)
- Highest number of remote communities
 - (very remote – 1% of population, remote – 3% of population)



Remote Communities



NT Communities



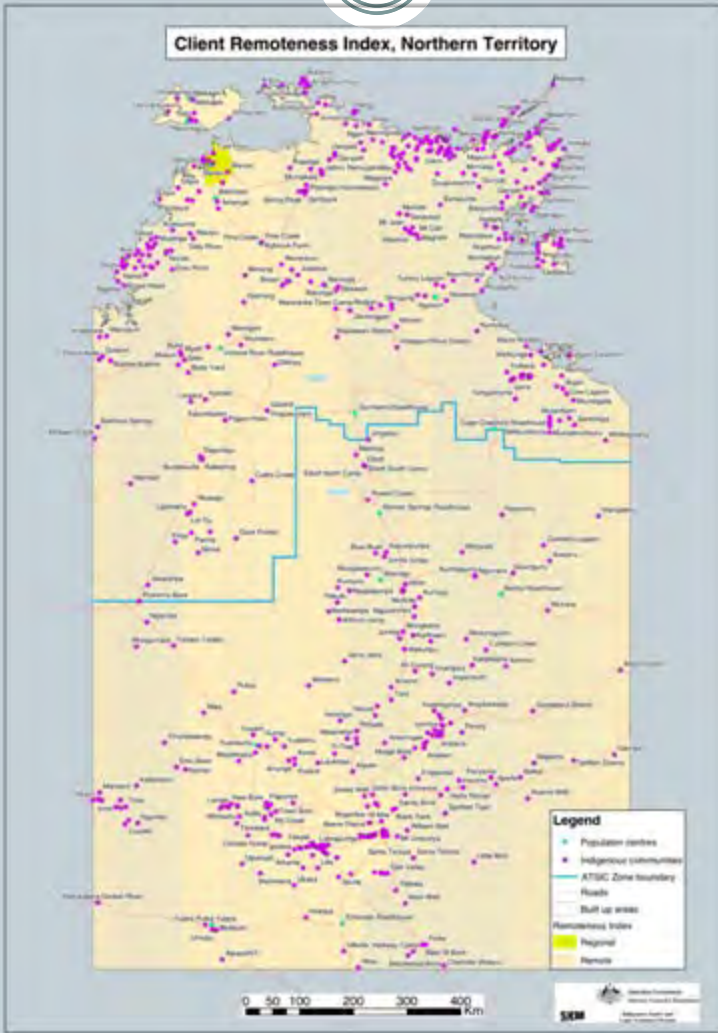
NT has 641 discrete Aboriginal communities

- 9 towns of 1,000 – 2,000 people
- 50 communities of 200 – 999 people
- 570 communities with less than 200 people

Characteristics of communities

- Geographically dispersed, isolated and subject seasonal conditions
- Lacking in basic infrastructure and services
- 72% of NT Aboriginal population lives on Aboriginal land outside major towns

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/pdf/legal/seminars/snapshot_of_the_NT.pdf



Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory



- **Highest**

- proportion the population (28 % compared to >4 % nationally)
- proportion of its population living in remote (23.3 per cent) or very remote areas (56 per cent)
- incarceration rate (81% of prisoners are Indigenous)
- reported crime rate
- child protection cases
- proportion of school students (41%)
- Levels of overcrowding in housing

- **Lowest**

- education achievement and completion rates
- participation in the labour force (45% compared to 85 % other NT people)
- lowest home ownership
- health status
- Youngest population (38% are under 15 yrs)

Services in remote communities



- **Small communities with limited infrastructure**
 - 54% have don't have a local health clinic
 - 99% have no specialist services
 - 94% do not have a preschool
 - Very few secondary schools

Increased numbers of visitors

- NGOs running programs
- Research organisations
- Private contractors (building and renovation, training, accreditation)
- Visiting health, education and community services
- Government agencies

... and Evaluators looking at all their activity



Visiting Community Services being delivered on Tiwi Islands (not including NT Health, Education and community Services)



Leadership roles and responsibilities for community leaders



- **Establishment of Shires replacing Community Councils**
 - Priorities are set at Shire rather than community level
 - Coordination of government services responsibility of Govt General Business Managers (GBMs) introduced as part of the Intervention
 - Other activities responsibility of Shire Services Managers
 - Reduced role for community leaders in planning, decision making and overseeing visiting services and activities

GBM and Council Office Canteen Creek



Increased monitoring and evaluation activities



- **To meet accountability reporting requirements**
- **Increased requirement on local services to provide monitoring data**
- **Outcome evaluation rather than developmental**
- **Focus on individual programs**
- **Evaluation work fragmented with little evidence of synthesis of findings**

what does this mean for
evaluation?



No framework for traditional community leaders to direct activities coming into the community



- **Replacement of Community Councils with Shires and local coordination by Govt Business Managers**
 - Disempowers local leadership
 - Takes away their central role in community affairs
 - Provides no mechanisms for visitors to have direct contact with community leaders who can guide them to correct people and ensure culturally competent practice
- **An evaluator can potentially follow all formal best practice protocols and bypass community leaders and people altogether**

In the past.....

Prior to the visit

- An evaluator / visitor would write to community
- Get permission to visit
- Apply for permit

On arrival

- Meet with council on arriving in community
- Be directed to key people in community
- Attend community meeting
- Work with and be guided by local people



Increased number of demands on already overburdened and undervalued people and agencies

- Evaluators rely on small number of agencies (school, health centre, council office and store) to facilitate and support
- A small core group of Aboriginal people in communities are called on to facilitate, input, coordinate, sit on advisory boards, interpret etc.
- Majority of the community are not (or minimally) involved
- Young people are not (or minimally) involved



Fragmentation of evaluation effort



- The focus is on individual programs – there is not much chance to join the dots.
- There is little evidence that the many evaluations are informing each other or building on knowledge gained already.

Little use of existing community skills and resources or capacity development



- **Little use of existing skills and knowledge in remote communities**
- **Little real effort to build the skills of local people in evaluation**

Community people and service providers want to contribute and influence



- People input to evaluation because they:
 - want their voice heard
 - want to influence the outcomes
 - hope the evaluation will contribute to improvements



Consequences of increasing review that does not lead to positive change

Increasing demands for information and support on community people and agencies

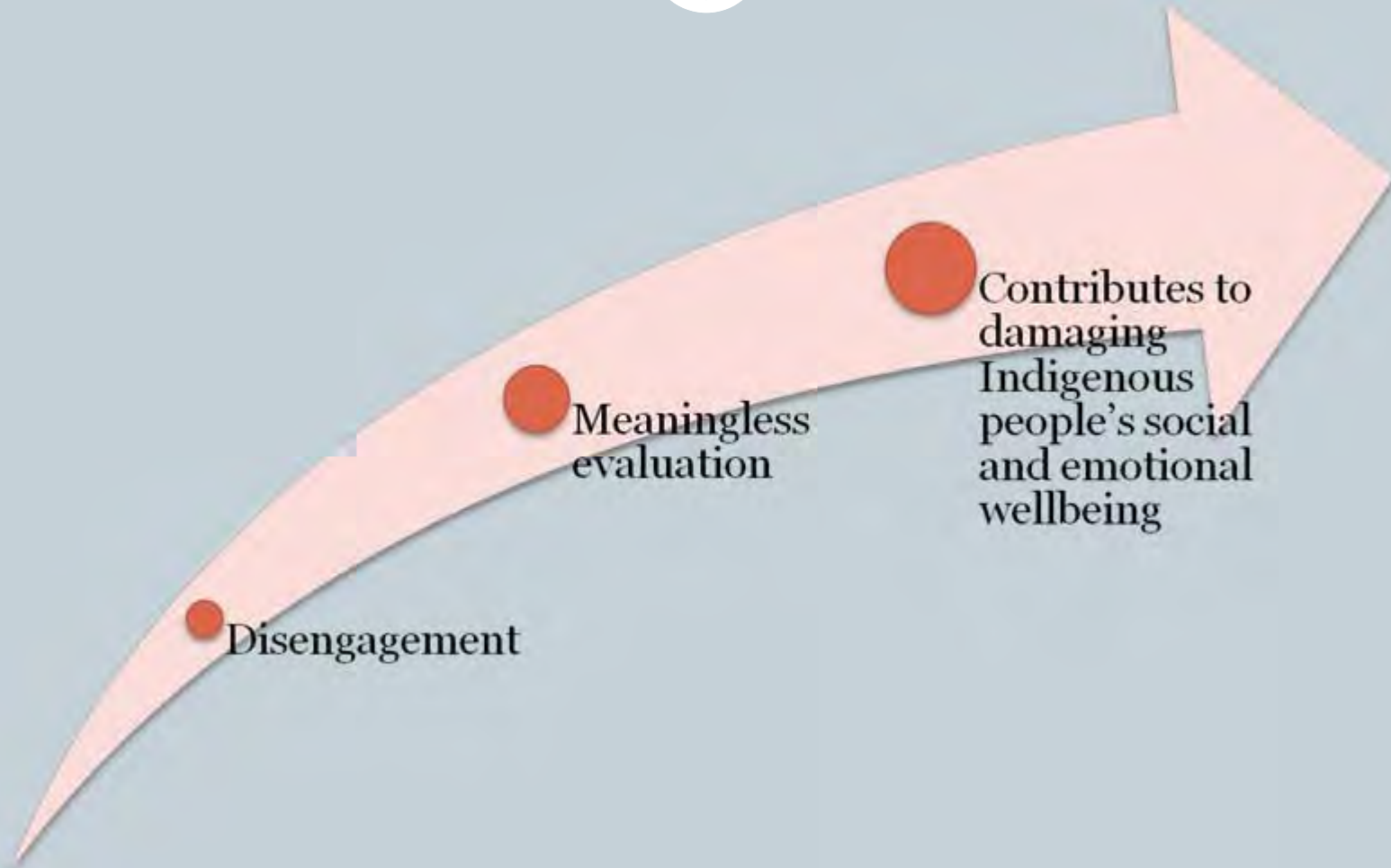
Raised expectations of ability to influence outcomes

Good will, support and engagement on the understanding that providing this will lead to improvements

Nothing changes, community voices haven't been listened to or taken into account

Disengagement with future activities – "what's the use?"

Meaningless and damaging evaluation



Disengagement

Meaningless
evaluation

Contributes to
damaging
Indigenous
people's social
and emotional
wellbeing

Validation



Independent review of policing in remote indigenous communities in the NT (April 2010)

Providing Feedback to communities

- Community members were generous with their time and thoughtful in their analysis of what would improve safety
- Despite strong advance efforts to carefully set up community meetings, review was seen as another fly-in/fly-out study, often alongside multiple other service agency consultations
- Little confidence that the community would hear any more
- Strong desire by communities to be jointly involved in the development of improved community safety initiatives.
- In some communities there is capacity among community members to commit to and undertake specific responsibilities
- In other communities there will be a clear need to develop this capacity
- Important that responses to the Review findings and recommendations be communicated along with the reasoning, so that the communities, police and other service agencies have a strong foundation for working together to improve community safety levels.

Conclusion

- It is important that the findings and recommendations of this Review do not disappear with the planes and 4WDs that transported the Review team away from the communities.

Evaluation that is empowering and strengthens participation



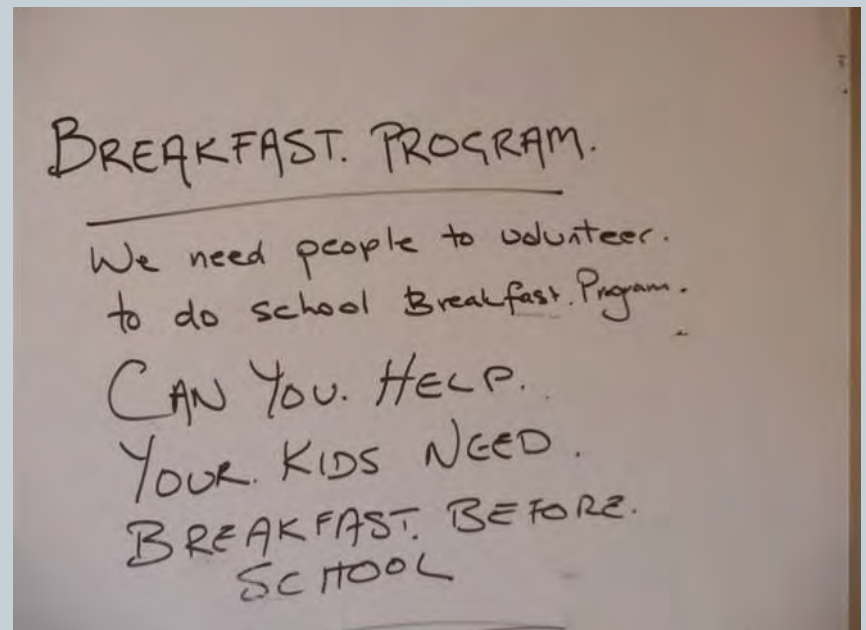
**STRATEGIES FOR EVALUATION THAT GIVES BACK AS
MUCH AS IT TAKES**

Involve community people at all stages of an evaluation - Lyn O'Donoghue



Do your research – Di Walker

- Do your homework before you go so you know something about the community and the key issues
- Identify local leaders, traditional owners, health centre and school staff
- Find out what else is happening on a community
- Who else is collecting similar data?
- What skills exist you can draw on and build on?



Recognise and utilise community people's skills

Gwen Paterson - Walley

Take a strengths based approach.

Ask:

- What strengths do community members bring to the evaluation ?
- Are there local interpreters?
- When is the best time to meet people?
- Who should be consulted?
- What is the best way to collect data?

Involve local people involved in planning and support for visits and follow up



Value and draw on the the skills of local people



- Local support is essential for the collection of any meaningful information
- Employ community people as part of the evaluation team
- Engage community guides to provide advice and help work with the different family groups, and language groups. are essential for this.
- Compensate people for their time and support.



Establish agreements



- **Develop a partnership agreement for working together**
- **Between the evaluators and community services, community leadership and the community about:**
 - how information will be collected
 - who will be involved
 - what will happen to the information
 - how the information will be used
 - how it will be given back or fed back to the community



Do not undermine local decision-making

- Identify where the evaluation sits within the local systems.
- Communicate with everyone the evaluation impacts on so that local decisions aren't destroyed at the policy/ program decision making level



Provide ongoing feedback in ways negotiated with community members and services

- **It is critical that people receive feedback about:**
 - what happened to their information
 - what recommendations were made and why
 - that they can approve any information attributed to them
 - What will happen next



Evaluators have to make decisions about whether to take on evaluations



- **The onus is on the evaluator to:**
 - Review what benefit an evaluation will have for a community and its people
 - To assess whether an evaluation can be done properly, in the timeframe, in a way that is ethical and leads to some improvements
 - Take advice from Aboriginal people and organisations
- **As a result we will decide not to do some projects**
 - provide feedback to commissioners about the weaknesses and difficulties of the required evaluation plan

Build in skills development as an integral part of the evaluation



Finally



**Thank you for taking the time to come and participate in
the presentation**

our contact details are

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