

**Review of
Community Development Program (CDP)
Submission to
Finance and Public Administration References Committee
by Chris Baulman
23 4 17**

I've been working on the the most fundamental challenges of community development for almost 40 years, so I really appreciate the opportunity to help in your review of the Community Development Program (CDP)

OVERVIEW

I've come to understand that much of what is generally thought to be positive for disengaged and redundant people is actually very negative, including within CDP.

I do think CDP could help "*achieve social, economic and cultural outcomes that meet the needs and aspirations of remote Indigenous people*". Indeed I believe it could even lead the way for suburban community development too. But in remote communities, the nature and underlying causes of joblessness in society as a whole become exaggerated.

My submission proposes two concepts -

- Beyond job creation, our BIGGEST challenge is to provide long-term ALTERNATIVES to employment for the SOCIAL INCLUSION of the remaining jobless & redundant.
- Having everyone in paid work needn't be the universal goal for healthy productive & sustainable community development.

I hope that in your consideration of this submission you will take on board these two concepts in the interests of all - but particularly the most oppressed - Aboriginals.

MY EXPERIENCE

Relevant to this review is my personal perspective as someone who has lived well below the poverty line for the last half of my life. I am 68 now, having experienced periods of homelessness and long-term unemployment. I'm very well "educated" in these matters and have a clearer understanding now than ever before of both government policy and its "client" implications.

I live with the disempowered, some of whom are aboriginal people - all of whom know how ultimately harsh things can be - all of whom naturally long for social inclusion and a respected role which the current market system cannot provide

them because competition, both locally and globally, is only growing.

It was a blessing for me to be able to maintain a high level of “social inclusion” by doing voluntary community work in FULL satisfaction of Centrelink's mutual obligations since the day I turned 55.

(See [Guide to Social Security Law – Voluntary Work for job seekers – 55years & over](#))

CDP, FAMILY & COMMUNITY

Even CDP's sharpest critics & economic traditionalists seem to recognise that a journey from the bottom must start on a sound footing with the support of family and your own community.

I'm sure CDP sees the reality understood by family and community - especially remote community - that whatever the program's agenda, “employment” is not only daunting, but a most unlikely outcome in most cases. Only the most ambitious people had hope in Community Development EMPLOYMENT Program CDEP (CDP's predecessor), and hope is not the mood of most experiencing poverty and disempowerment.

So in that sense, CD(E)P doomed itself to resentment and failure in most cases. Probable failure to get employment is the last thing most people would be interested in embarking upon.

However I do wonder when, in spite of the name change, the terms of reference for this review seem to reinstate the priority of jobs over community development.

So it's easy to see there is a tension between jobs & community needs across our society, which many believe is unhealthy & unsustainable, and it goes to the headline question in the terms of reference

“...The appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program (CDP)”

REALITY CHECK

Unless you believe ALL people of working age & ability WILL get a job, notwithstanding robot & globalisation redundancies, and the massive outstanding debt of our economic system to Nature which will render many industries & jobs unviable, then communities everywhere urgently need to start developing “*alternative approaches to addressing joblessness*” in rural & remote communities, but in suburbia too where “refugees” seek support services when it else fails.

We DO have a growing employment crisis. Pretending remote communities are not MUCH more impacted is simply denialism ... and rampant racism makes every aspect of the job imperative harsher for aboriginal people!

I believe it's of growing importance that social inclusion MUST be available through alternatives to employment, and that in community development there are indeed TRULY alternative approaches to addressing joblessness. This can be seen in the choice of many Over 55 year olds to productively meet their "mutual obligation requirement" through participation in the community development work of approved community organisations.
(See [Guide to Social Security Law – Voluntary Work for job seekers – 55years & over](#))

A "job for all" outcome needn't be the universal goal for healthy productive & sustainable community development. Indeed healthy productive & sustainable community development can be THE goal ... that's quite a "job" in its own right, which every neighbourhood needs and could greatly benefit from.

DYNAMICS

The initial motivation for participation in community development might well be to simply collect the dole, but if you get the dynamic right ... and it's not right now ... people will always naturally want the best possible return from what they are doing. They want paid employment if possible, and that can become ever more possible for some to achieve through community participation and the confidence and experience they gain.

If market economics is soundly based, it says that after meeting their basic needs, most people will naturally want more comfort. Viable employment ambitions & opportunities evolve naturally for those who want more than what "community development" alone can provide.

So we might relax just a little & leave ambition to nature. Just focus on getting the atmosphere & the PROCESS for "community development" right...ie. let's try for a more effective Community Development Program. The alternative to joblessness COULD be community participation, WITHOUT imposing any employment agenda. If an agenda is imposed, it disempowers individuals and devalues their efforts in community development. "Fine, but we want you to get REAL work" is clearly demeaning of their contribution and is destructive.

In relation to "dynamics", I want to address another of the terms of reference here....

"...the extent of consultation and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the design and implementation of the CDP, and the role for local decision making within the program"

Community development can't be done from the outside or from above and that is a fact neither CDP nor the community itself has resolved. Even in pretty close knit communities there is a hierarchy which imposes itself and creates resentment ,especially among those at the bottom.

The community itself doesn't have a non-hierarchical process, so it too struggles with top-down agenda setting and community legitimacy. This is particularly so when its "representatives" are seen to be implementing the agenda of outsiders, who are seen by community members to continue to oppress them by their very existence. They feel deeply oppressed by a land enclosure system which seeks to force them become economic units in a system which they see to be divorced from the land and nature itself.

Having an agenda established by outsider hierarchies, or even through insider hierarchies, is disempowering for community & for individuals.

NEW PROCESS

For CDP to realise its full potential, an entirely new process for collaboration is needed for community and personal empowerment ... especially for the inclusion of those at the bottom who have found current systems to be alienating.

Community development workers are very familiar with the method of collaboration using "Post-it" notes which helps all participants at a meeting have their say & it records their input in their own words. This process is an improvement on the usual meeting model, but it still requires attendance at meetings, coordination, a high level of participant confidence & literacy (or a scribe). It's expensive and is not sufficiently accessible or inclusive.

This Post-it note method is seen in a video which shows how a team I've been working with has digitised and expanded it.
(See – [Cooperator Video](#))

It incorporates the elements of project management with the post it note system in a process that it makes available online to anyone, 24/7. This overcomes major obstacles that make such processes only really suitable for use with qualified professionals & among the motivated ... not in untrained, let alone illiterate communities.

(By the way this submission was voice typed which starts to overcome the literacy issue.)

This new process gives every individual, wherever they are, equal opportunity to initiate anything and to have equal say at every stage in design and implementation of community development. It gives all equal access to knowledge and personal control over their own participation.

This new process is a step-by-step checkbox formula for success in any undertaking. I won't explain it in any greater detail than I have above...in any case it's a "learn by collaborating" application.

... CAREFUL

How to INTRODUCE any new process into the existing dynamics is the big

challenge here. It can't be imposed ... it would need to sit as a passive option ... an open, inclusive and transparent supplement to whatever familiar process the community and the bureaucrats may decide to stick with for the time being. By merely existing next to the established processes and by being promoted as an option, it would be compared over time to the usual representative/hierarchical/skill-requiring processes with their usual problems.

So the three elements of my submission are these ...

- Be patient with CDP. Keep the principle of “mutual obligations” – “Earn or Learn” - but add “or Participate” so as to formally recognise its equal value. The “or participate” option is already in place for jobless people who are over 55yrs
(See [Guide to Social Security Law – Voluntary Work for job seekers – 55years & over](#))
- Continue to let the community decide on the participation it values, but by a process where the least empowered can have a strong voice too. Protest is their only current option and that ranges from antisocial behaviour to suicide. The process needs to make individuals equal, not make hierarchies master. This is a key feature of the new process I touched on above.
(See - [Participation](#))
- Engage in that new process yourselves in parallel with your usual methods, but as individuals with ideas, not as representatives or hierarchies. Trust that in this open process, the best ideas will be recognised and used, because in an open process, people can't uphold bad ideas or lies without being unmasked.
(See – [Cooperator Video](#))

I hope I have explained my points well enough for you to understand and appreciate them. I would value any opportunity to discuss them further. I can be contacted by email or on the number below.

Chris Baulman