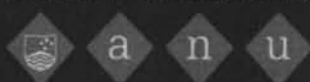


The Australian National University



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Discussion Paper



**The relative economic status of
indigenous people in Western
Australia, 1986-91**

J. Taylor and L. Roach

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SERIES NOTE

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- investigate the stimulation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic development and issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and unemployment;
- identify and analyse the factors affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour force; and
- assist in the development of government strategies aimed at raising the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour market.

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ABSTRACT

A mid-term review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) has recently been completed. While much of the associated policy-rhetoric and assessment of policy outcomes has been aimed at the national level, the fiscal environment in which AEDP goals are to be achieved is invariably one of regional labour markets and administrative systems operating in the economic context of States and Territories. In view of this reality, this paper responds to a need for regional-level analyses of change in the economic status of indigenous people compared to that of non-indigenous people in each State and Territory. Using 1986 and 1991 Census-based social indicators for Western Australia, attention is focussed on relative shifts in population growth and intra-State distribution, labour force and income status, and levels of welfare dependency (measured as non-employment income). A major finding is that while the gap in labour force status between indigenous and non-indigenous people has narrowed, the relative income status and level of welfare dependency of indigenous people has not improved. This suggests that increased emphasis on the quality of AEDP outcomes, and not just quantity, will be necessary if the overall aims of the AEDP are to be accomplished.

Acknowledgments

The rationale for individual State and Territory analyses of change in the economic status of indigenous Australians emerged from discussions with colleagues at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR). We are particularly indebted to Jon Altman for comments on early versions of this paper. The data used were purchased from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to inform Phase 2 of the 1993 review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy. A large part of the exercise was devoted to the design, acquisition and tabulation of these data. Raw table figures were provided on floppy disk by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics Unit of ABS in Darwin. Statistical manipulation was conducted by INTSTAT Australia Pty Ltd and by Liu Jin, Research Officer at CAEPR. Krystyna Szokalski provided her usual high standard of editorial assistance and Nicky Lumb contributed careful proof-reading.

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Foreword

During the second half of 1993, CAEPR undertook Phase 2 of the evaluation of the AEDP on a consultancy basis for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The major outputs from this consultancy have been published as CAEPR Research Monograph No. 5 *The Relative Economic Status of Indigenous Australians 1986-91* and No. 6 *Regional Change in the Economic Status of Indigenous Australians 1986-91*, both authored by Dr John Taylor. These monographs were based on special tables summarising and cross-tabulating 1986 and 1991 Census data ordered from ABS.

The large amount of data generated from the censuses could not be fully summarised in the two research monographs and as part of its consultancy, CAEPR also provided ATSIC with 32-page statistical summaries for each State and Territory for the use of the AEDP Review Secretariat and Review Committee. These summaries form the basis of a series of CAEPR Discussion Papers that focus on intercensal changes between 1986 and 1991 in the comparative economic status of indigenous Australians at the State and Territory level. The first five discussion papers in this series, CAEPR Discussion Papers No. 55 to No. 59, co-authored by Dr John Taylor and Ms Linda Roach, take an intentionally standard approach to the analysis of these data. Subsequent discussion papers on the situation in Queensland, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory will vary somewhat from this standard approach: Queensland data will be presented for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people separately; and the analysis of Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory data will take into account the somewhat unusual population distribution in each jurisdiction.

This set of State-oriented discussion papers are a little different from most of CAEPR's research output, but are regarded as analytically valuable for two main reasons. First, CAEPR's research charter requires it to examine the economic situation of indigenous Australians at the State and Territory, as well as national and regional, levels of aggregation. Second, while ABS output on indigenous Australians is available in standard publications based on the 1986 and 1991 Census, there is little published that rigorously and systematically compares the economic status of indigenous Australians with non-indigenous Australians over time. It is hoped that each of these five discussion papers will be especially useful for policy development purposes at the State level.

Jon Altman
Series Editor
April 1994

A mid-term review of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP) has recently been completed (Bamblett 1994). The AEDP was originally developed as an immediate Commonwealth response to the *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* (Miller 1985) and launched in association with the 1986-87 Commonwealth Budget. Subsequently, the AEDP was expanded and officially launched in November 1987. In late 1992, the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University negotiated with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to provide an analysis of official census statistics to assist the review process. This resulted in the publication of two monographs on national and inter-regional changes in the economic status of indigenous Australians between 1986 and 1991 (Taylor 1993a, 1993b).

The *Aboriginal Employment Development Policy Statement* (Australian Government 1987) highlighted that the overall objective of the AEDP is to assist indigenous Australians to achieve broad equity with other Australians in terms of employment and economic status. This objective was incorporated in three specific goals that emphasise both equity and statistical equality. These are:

- the achievement of employment equality with other Australians, that is to increase the proportion of indigenous Australians of working age, in employment to equal that of the total population;
- the achievement of income equality with other Australians, that is to increase median individual incomes to the median of the total population; and
- to reduce the welfare dependency of indigenous Australians to a level commensurate with that of other Australians, with a particular emphasis on unemployment-related welfare.

It has been understood for some time that an assessment of AEDP outcomes, in broad policy and statistical terms, would be almost entirely dependent on labour force statistics collected in the five-yearly Census of Population and Housing (Altman 1991: 168-70, 1992). In this context, it was fortunate that a degree of correlation emerged between the 1986 Census, the official launch of the AEDP, the availability of 1991 Census data in 1993 and the timing of its mid-term review. With this in mind, the terms of reference for Phase 2 of the evaluation of the AEDP agreed upon between the inter-agency AEDP Review Co-ordinating Committee and CAEPR stated specifically:

In order to assist in assessing the impact of the AEDP, conduct a detailed analysis of 1986 and 1991 Census data to ascertain the degree

to which the AEDP objectives have been achieved and in particular examine:

- the extent to which the income status of indigenous people has improved since 1986;
- the extent to which the employment status of indigenous people has improved since 1986;
- the extent to which the dependency of indigenous people on welfare (non-employment income) has declined since 1986.

Where possible, the analysis should also seek to identify:

- comparative changes in income status, employment and welfare dependence over the period since 1986 for the general Australian population;
- changes in overall macroeconomic conditions and employment opportunities in the mainstream labour market;
- other relevant factors like demographic, gender and locational issues impacting on the achievement of AEDP targets.

In recognition of renewed policy interest in regional issues, both within ATSIC and the Federal Government (Kelty 1993), and to allow information on the contemporary economic status of indigenous Australians to be disseminated as widely as possible, these issues have now been analysed for each State and Territory and the findings are presented in a series of CAEPR Discussion Papers. This paper is concerned with Western Australia. Unlike Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) State publications on indigenous people (ABS 1993), the focus of attention here is on intercensal change in labour force and income status with direct comparison drawn between indigenous and non-indigenous populations.

Population size and distribution, 1986-91

To analyse change in the economic status of indigenous people in Western Australia compared to that of the rest of the State's population, an appreciation of respective population growth rates and spatial distributions is crucial. This is because different pressures are brought to bear on the need for new job creation by variable rates of growth in working-age population while the economy itself varies in its capacity to create employment in different places.

Previous analyses at the national level have identified an urban/rural gradient in regard to broad levels of economic status among indigenous Australians (Gray and Tesfaghiorghis 1991; Taylor 1993a, 1993b). It has

also been noted that the delivery of economic policy initiatives under the AEDP has a rationale based on the size of localities where clients live. Community-based programs are predominant in small, mostly rural places where labour markets are poorly developed, while mainstream initiatives are more evident in urban places (Taylor 1993a: 5-6). Given the policy significance of these structural distinctions, the subsequent analysis is organised according to the ABS's section-of-State classification, although for analytical convenience the standard four-way taxonomy has been reduced to three components by amalgamating data for bounded localities and the rural balance to create a single 'rural' category (0-999 persons).¹

The indigenous population

According to Gaminiratne (1993) the coverage of the indigenous population in the 1991 Census in Western Australia, compared to that of the 1986 Census, declined. The result was a lower than expected census count in 1991 with the observed population growth rate of 2 per cent per annum falling behind the expected rate of 2.5 per cent per annum (Gaminiratne 1993: 5). This situation contrasts with the rest of Australia where the change in census count between 1986 and 1991 accords broadly with expectations, giving some cause for confidence, for the first time, in its interpretation (Gray and Tesfaghiorghis 1993).

A major feature of indigenous population redistribution over the past two decades has been an increase in the proportion resident in Perth and other urban centres. For example, between 1971 and 1986 the proportion of the State's indigenous population living in the metropolitan area increased from 10 per cent to 23 per cent while the proportion living in smaller urban centres such as Bunbury, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie and Port Hedland increased from 30 per cent to 42 per cent. Accordingly, the rural share of the population has declined considerably from 60 per cent of the total in 1971 to only 35 per cent in 1986. No specific research has examined the dynamics of this shift in distribution, although Gray (1989: 133) speculates that it is associated with the very active program of state housing provision in urban centres with initial rural-urban movements sustained by chain migration in much the same way as reported for South Australia by Gale (1972). This likelihood is given added weight by figures quoted in Arthur (1991: 16) which indicate that two-thirds of the funding for Aboriginal housing in Western Australia allocated under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement is spent in urban areas. Also relevant to an understanding of shifts in distribution is the growing tendency for urban-based indigenous people to self-identify in the census (Altman 1992: 8).

Analysis of indigenous population change by section-of-State for the most recent intercensal period between 1986 and 1991 indicates that the trend towards urbanisation has continued (Table 1). The rate of population increase was highest in Perth followed closely by non-metropolitan towns.

Rural areas, on the other hand, experienced below average growth in population and account for a decreasing share of the State total. While the overall trend towards urban residence appears unequivocal, some degree of caution is required in the interpretation of these data. First, it appears that coverage of the indigenous population in Western Australia in the 1991 Census declined compared to that in 1986 resulting in lower than expected population growth (Luther, Gaminiratne and Gray 1993; Gaminiratne 1993: 5). While the tendency has been for undercounts of the indigenous population to be more evident in urban areas, the majority of the rural-based population in Western Australia was enumerated by remote area census techniques which are also potentially prone to coverage problems (Taylor 1993c). Second, it is difficult to postulate a clear division between urban and rural populations, not least in Western Australia where the existence of frequent circular mobility linking towns with country hinterlands in the form of 'beats', 'lines' or 'runs' has long been recognised (Sansom 1982: 122-30).

Table 1. Change in indigenous population by section-of-State: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-91	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	8,949	23.7	10,236	24.5	1,287	14.4
Other urban	15,775	41.7	17,535	42.0	1,760	11.2
Rural	13,066	34.6	14,011	33.5	945	7.2
Total	37,790	100.0	41,782	100.0	3,992	10.6

The non-indigenous population

The non-indigenous population of Western Australia displayed an equivalent tendency to vary its overall distribution between 1986 and 1991 with redistribution trends similar to those apparent among indigenous people (Table 2). As with the indigenous population, the majority of the State's residents are now slightly more prevalent in Perth and other urban areas and slightly less likely to be found in rural areas. However, the factors underlying this trend are likely to differ somewhat from those characterising urbanisation among indigenous people, having more to do with employment-related movement involving net gains in urban areas from interstate migration (Bell 1992: 72-3). Apart from this distinction, the overwhelming contrast with the indigenous population remains the far greater concentration of the majority of the State's residents in Perth.

Table 2. Change in non-indigenous population by section-of-State: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-1991	
	No. (million)	Per cent	No. (million)	Per cent	Net change	Per cent change
Major urban	0.88	64.9	1.00	65.3	121,695	13.7
Other urban	0.28	20.6	0.32	20.8	40,169	14.3
Rural	0.19	14.5	0.21	13.9	17,184	8.7
Total	1.36	100.0	1.54	100.0	179,048	13.1

Change in the working-age population, 1986-91

Contrary to general expectations foreshadowed by Gray and Tesfaghiorghis (1991) for all indigenous Australians, the rate of growth of the population of working age fell behind that of the rest of the working-age population during the 1986-91 intercensal period. According to Table 3 the rate of increase in the indigenous population of working age was barely three-quarters of the level recorded for the rest of the population. This was despite relatively high rates of natural increase among indigenous people induced by demographic processes set in train during the early 1970s. Likely reasons for this discrepancy include the evidence already presented pointing to census undercount in Western Australia in 1991 combined with the observation of Gray and Tesfaghiorghis (1993: 84) that a significant proportion of indigenous males in the young adult age group of 15-29 years are generally missed by census counts. Another, more concrete, explanation derives from the substantially lower rate of net interstate migration gain among the indigenous working-age population. Between 1986 and 1991, the State's indigenous population was augmented by only 139 persons due to interstate migration, representing a net rate of migration loss of around 6 per thousand of the average number who could have migrated. This compares with a net gain of 11,340 among the rest of the working-age population, or 12 per thousand.

Table 3. Change in population aged 15-64 years among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	1986	1991	1986-1991	
			Net change	Per cent change
Indigenous	21,541	23,538	1,997	9.3
Non-indigenous	914,482	1,033,668	119,186	13.0

Labour force status, 1986-91

Three standard social indicators are used here to indicate the extent and direction of relative change in indigenous labour force status: the employment rate, representing the percentage of those aged 15-64 years who indicated in the census that they were in employment during the week prior to enumeration; the unemployment rate, expressing those who indicated that they were not in employment but had actively looked for work during the four weeks prior to enumeration as a percentage of those in the labour force (those employed plus those unemployed); and the labour force participation rate, representing those in the labour force as a percentage of those of working age.

Table 4. Change in labour force status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Indigenous		Non-indigenous	
	1986	1991	1986	1991
	(1)	(1)	(2)	(2)
Employment rate	29.1	32.9	65.2	64.4
Unemployment rate	38.9	36.1	9.0	12.1
Participation rate	47.6	51.4	71.6	73.3
Ratios (1/2)				
Employment rate	0.44	0.51		
Unemployment rate	4.30	3.00		
Participation rate	0.66	0.70		

All figures exclude those who did not state their labour force status.

Between 1986 and 1991, the overall employment rate of indigenous people in Western Australia showed some sign of improvement, rising from 29.1 per cent to 32.9 per cent (Table 4). It is instructive to consider this positive trend in a wider labour market context as corresponding figures for the rest of the State's working-age population show a decline from 65.2 per cent in 1986 to 64.4 per cent in 1991. Thus, a marginal degree of convergence in employment levels between the two groups has been achieved although it is important to note that the rate for indigenous people remains substantially below the State average as indicated by the low ratio of employment rates. At the same time, it is worth recalling that the relative improvement in indigenous labour force status has been achieved against a background of lower growth in the indigenous population of working age.

A similar closure of the gap in labour force status between indigenous people and the rest of the population is apparent from intercensal shifts in

unemployment rates (Table 4). The results point to a significant decline in the indigenous unemployment rate at a time when the non-indigenous rate rose noticeably. Even though the indigenous unemployment rate as a ratio of the non-indigenous rate fell from being 4.3 times higher in 1986, it was still 3 times higher in 1991.

It is important to qualify discussions of relative employment and unemployment rates with data on relative rates of labour force participation since the proportion of indigenous people aged 15-64 years who are formally attached to the labour market has always been comparatively low. Evidence from the 1991 Census indicates that this is still the case (Table 4). Despite the fact that the indigenous labour force participation rate increased from 47.6 per cent in 1986 to 51.4 per cent in 1991, the non-indigenous participation rate also rose from 71.6 per cent to 73.3 per cent, thus maintaining its substantially higher level.

A number of points are relevant in interpreting these data. First, the relative improvement in the participation rate of indigenous people is to be expected given their lower rate of growth in working age population. Likewise, relative improvement in the employment rate has been achieved against a background where proportionally fewer indigenous people are potentially eligible for work.

One factor, which appears to have dampened the rate of growth in labour force participation in many other States, is the move to encourage higher levels of Aboriginal attendance and retention in educational institutions under the Federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. This does not apply in Western Australia since the proportion of indigenous people aged 15 years and over who were reported by the census as attending an educational institution in the State, either full-time or part-time, actually fell from 4,142 in 1986 to 4,038 in 1991 (Taylor 1993a: 16). It seems that, in Western Australia, standard explanations advanced by labour economists of intractable low participation due to structural factors operating to discourage indigenous people from seeking employment, may have validity (Daly 1992).

Section-of-State and gender variations

A quite different picture of intercensal change in labour force status emerges from a disaggregation of the data by section-of-State and gender. The magnitude and net direction of such shifts are shown in Tables 5 and 6, while the actual rates from which these are calculated are shown in Tables 7 and 8. Contrary to what might be expected, the change in labour force status of indigenous males in Perth and other urban areas ran counter to the general positive trend with employment rates falling and unemployment rising. This contrasts with the situation among indigenous females in urban areas whose labour force status notably improved. One point worth noting

is that the variation in changing labour force status between males and females in urban areas follows the pattern found in the workforce generally (Table 6). This may indicate that in Perth and other urban areas where opportunities are largely in mainstream labour markets, indigenous people are more prone to the economic forces shaping work patterns in the population generally.

Table 5. Net change in labour force status of indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Other urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males				
Employment rate	-0.4	-2.8	10.8	2.8
Unemployment rate	3.4	3.6	-11.5	-2.1
Participation rate	3.5	-0.9	5.0	2.4
Females				
Employment rate	5.2	3.7	6.1	4.8
Unemployment rate	-0.6	-2.1	-10.0	-3.9
Participation rate	7.6	4.9	3.6	5.2

Table 6. Net change in labour force status of non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Major urban Net change	Other urban Net change	Rural Net change	Total Net change
Males				
Employment rate	-5.1	-4.0	-2.1	-4.5
Unemployment rate	4.7	4.2	3.3	4.4
Participation rate	-1.4	-0.5	0.9	-0.9
Females				
Employment rate	2.8	4.9	3.0	3.2
Unemployment rate	1.7	0.2	1.2	1.3
Participation rate	4.3	5.7	4.0	4.5

The greatest shifts in labour force status are apparent in rural areas, where regardless of gender, increase in the indigenous employment rate has been substantial and the unemployment rate has shown a marked decline. The rural employment rate, for example, increased by 10.8 percentage points for males and 6.1 percentage points for females, while the unemployment rate correspondingly fell by 11.5 percentage points for males and 10

percentage points for females. As a result of these differential shifts based on settlement size, the employment rate in rural areas is now far higher than elsewhere in the State and the unemployment rate is far lower (Table 7). This contrasts markedly with the rest of the population who display only slight variation in labour force status between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas (Table 8).

Table 7. Change in labour force status of indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Major urban		Other urban		Rural		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Males								
Employment rate	36.8	36.5	36.1	33.3	39.7	50.5	37.6	40.4
Unemployment rate	43.6	47.0	43.9	47.5	33.5	22.0	40.1	38.0
Participation rate	65.3	68.8	64.3	63.4	59.8	64.7	62.8	65.2
Females								
Employment rate	22.1	27.4	19.0	22.7	21.9	28.0	20.8	25.6
Unemployment rate	34.8	34.2	41.0	38.9	32.7	22.7	36.7	32.8
Participation rate	33.9	41.6	32.2	37.1	32.6	36.2	32.8	38.0

Table 8. Change in labour force status of non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State and gender: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Major urban		Other urban		Rural		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Males								
Employment rate	77.0	71.9	79.2	75.2	79.7	77.7	77.9	73.4
Unemployment rate	9.3	13.9	8.6	12.7	7.2	10.5	8.8	13.2
Participation rate	84.9	83.5	86.6	86.2	85.9	86.8	85.4	84.5
Females								
Employment rate	53.2	56.1	46.7	51.6	53.3	56.3	52.0	55.2
Unemployment rate	9.1	10.8	11.1	11.2	7.8	8.9	9.3	10.6
Participation rate	58.6	62.8	52.5	58.1	57.8	61.8	57.3	61.8

Such relatively favourable impacts in rural areas are unlikely to have derived from market forces and point more realistically to the effect of widespread program intervention, particularly in the form of the CDEP scheme.² At the time of the 1986 Census there were 14 communities involved in the CDEP scheme in Western Australia with 1,803 participants. By 1991, 55 communities were engaged in the scheme with a total of 3,996

participants. All of these participating communities, with the exception of Halls Creek, were defined as rural localities in the census.

Employment growth and the AEDP

The likelihood that AEDP initiatives have served to enhance the relative standing of indigenous people in the labour market is suggested by their much higher rate of intercensal employment growth compared to other residents of Western Australia (Table 9). Between 1986 and 1991, the number of indigenous people in employment grew by 1,443 representing an increase of 24.4 per cent, more than twice the rate recorded for the rest of the population. In estimating the proportion of this employment growth due to participation in the CDEP scheme, much depends on assumptions made regarding the ratio of CDEP scheme workers to participants as the participant schedules include non-working spouses. A 60 per cent ratio is employed here as a best estimate using the scant evidence available from the 1993 review of the scheme (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu 1993: 51). Clearly, a higher ratio, would increase the contribution of CDEP scheme employment to total employment with associated policy significance.

Table 9. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Number employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous	5,912	7,355	1,443	24.4
Non-indigenous	583,940	651,143	67,203	11.5
Total	589,852	658,498	68,646	11.6

Using the minimum ratio, it is estimated that expansion of the CDEP scheme accounted for an increase of 1,315 jobs between 1986 and 1991, with all except 30 of these generated in rural areas. However, according to Table 10, the net increase in rural jobs for indigenous people was only 830. This suggests that some 455 other rural jobs were shed during the intercensal period, a figure which tallies with census data showing a loss of 347 jobs for indigenous people in agricultural industries alone over the same period. Thus, without increased participation in the CDEP scheme, rural labour force status would have been far worse than indicated by 1991 Census data.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to be precise about the impact of CDEP scheme participation on employment change given that calculations are based on assumptions regarding the ratio of actual workers in the scheme to

those registered as participants. Furthermore, the data are drawn from an administrative data base which is not strictly compatible with census data. If anything, the estimate of the CDEP scheme's contribution to intercensal employment growth is likely to be a minimum figure judging by early returns from ATSIC's newly instituted CDEP Census (Taylor 1993b: 35-6). If this is so, then the loss of rural jobs in the private sector could have been greater still.

Table 10. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Major urban	24.5	23.9	313	21.6
Other urban	38.2	34.9	300	13.3
Rural	37.3	41.2	830	37.6
Total	100.0	100.0	1,443	24.4
Non-indigenous				
Major urban	65.4	65.4	43,569	11.4
Other urban	19.3	19.7	15,828	14.0
Rural	15.3	14.9	7,806	8.8
Total	100.0	100.0	67,203	11.5

In urban areas of the State, employment growth for indigenous people was more muted, particularly in country towns which accounted for 42 per cent of the population in 1991 (Table 1) but only 13.3 per cent of job growth (Table 10). Indigenous residents of Perth fared better and recorded a much higher growth in jobs than the rest of the metropolitan population, albeit from a much lower numeric base. This suggests that the public and private sector initiatives of the AEDP left some mark, although precisely in what manner and to what extent is difficult to determine.

Information on the number of placements in the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP) and other DEET labour market programs in Western Australia over the course of the intercensal period are difficult to obtain. However, figures made available by DEET for the year 1989-90 indicate that a total of 3,500 indigenous people commenced placements in all labour market programs in the State. Even though this level of placement was not sustained throughout the five-yearly intercensal period, and assuming that some placements were made in rural areas, the gap between recorded urban job growth and placement data is striking. One explanation may be that many TAP placements do not represent 'new' entrants to 'new' jobs, but simply reflect the recycling of individuals several times through a constant,

or even declining, pool of positions (Johnston 1991: 73). Another may be found in the short duration of subsidies and program support combined with the failure of some participants to remain in programs. Finally, any positive employment outcomes from program placements may simply have been relinquished by census time (Daly 1993). Thus, improvements in labour force status, particularly among males, that may have been expected to occur in urban areas due to the application of private and public sector employment programs administered by DEET do not emerge from the data.

Table 11. Employment growth among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by gender: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Males	63.8	60.6	689	18.3
Females	36.2	39.4	754	35.2
Total	100.0	100.0	1,443	24.4
Non-indigenous				
Males	60.9	57.6	19,603	5.5
Females	39.1	42.4	47,600	20.9
Total	100.0	100.0	67,203	11.5

The precarious labour market position of indigenous males is underlined by the fact that just over half of all new jobs for indigenous people (52 per cent) went to females. Because of their far fewer numbers in the labour force, however, indigenous females experienced a much higher rate of employment growth (Table 11). This is in line with the general gender pattern of job growth in the State and it is worth emphasising that the rate at which non-indigenous males gained new employment was substantially below that of their indigenous counterparts. Thus, in the deteriorating labour market conditions of the early 1990s one important impact of the AEDP may simply have been to ameliorate potentially worse employment outcomes for many indigenous males seeking opportunities in mainstream urban labour markets.

Income status, 1986-91

A key goal of the AEDP is to achieve an improvement in income levels for indigenous Australians to a point where they are equal to those of the general population. In this endeavour, much depends, not just on

accelerating the rate of employment growth among indigenous people above that of the rest of the workforce, but also on ensuring that the types of jobs created generate incomes that are commensurate with those of the general population. Given the relative improvement in the labour force status of indigenous people in Western Australia there would appear to be statistical grounds for expecting that the income gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians may have narrowed.

Table 12. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Income (\$000s)			
	Indigenous 1986	Indigenous 1991	Non-indigenous 1986	Non-indigenous 1991
Mean	7.6	11.1	13.3	19.3
Median	5.8	8.1	11.3	16.1
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous				
Mean	0.57	0.58		
Median	0.52	0.51		

Overall, however, the census indicates little change with mean income for the indigenous adult population as a ratio of that for the rest of the population, showing only a slight rise from 0.57 in 1986 to 0.58 in 1991 (Table 12).³ Median income was somewhat lower as a ratio of the non-indigenous median but displayed a slight decline. This divergent trend is only minor and no doubt reflects the different bases for calculation. Accordingly, the essential conclusion to be drawn from both measures is simply that income relativity has not changed during the intercensal period. This lack of improvement in relative incomes is not surprising given that such a large proportion of new jobs for indigenous people have been generated by participation in the CDEP scheme, although this has occurred at a time when income inequality for the population generally has widened (Saunders 1992). If the CDEP scheme, with its current emphasis on low-wage work, continues to provide the bulk of new employment for indigenous people, there seems little prospect that the overall income gap between them and the rest of the population in Western Australia will narrow. If anything, it is likely to widen further. This is of crucial policy significance as it signals that improvements in labour force status alone are not sufficient to enhance income status, unless the CDEP scheme becomes more oriented to the stimulation of income generation. Of equal importance to job creation is the nature of the work involved and the income it generates.

Income change by section-of-State

The fact that overall income levels are influenced as much by the nature of work as by the rate of employment growth is reflected in data showing change in the income status of indigenous people by section-of-State (Table 13).

Table 13. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by section-of-State: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Income (\$000s)							
	Major urban 1986	Major urban 1991	Other urban 1986	Other urban 1991	Rural 1986	Rural 1991	Total 1986	Total 1991
Indigenous								
Mean	8.1	12.7	7.8	11.9	7.0	9.0	7.6	11.1
Median	6.2	9.9	5.8	9.2	5.7	7.0	5.8	8.1
Non-indigenous								
Mean	13.4	19.2	13.5	19.8	12.8	18.8	13.3	19.3
Median	11.6	16.2	11.1	16.3	9.9	15.1	11.3	16.1
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous								
Mean	0.60	0.66	0.58	0.60	0.55	0.48	0.57	0.58
Median	0.53	0.61	0.52	0.56	0.58	0.47	0.52	0.51

Despite the fact that intercensal improvement in the labour force status of indigenous people has been most noticeable in rural areas, income levels remain inversely related to settlement size. Furthermore, the rural/urban gap appears to be widening. The ratio of mean income for rural-based indigenous people compared to those in Perth, for example, decreased from 0.86 in 1986 to 0.71 in 1991. Comparing rural income with other urban income, the ratio of mean income also declined from 0.90 in 1986 to 0.76 in 1991. It is interesting to note that over the same period the ratio of mean income for rural-based non-indigenous people compared to those in Perth remained close to parity and actually rose from 0.96 in 1986 to 0.98 in 1991. The growing gap between urban and rural income among indigenous people is to be expected given the composition of rural employment growth as part-time work with remuneration based on unemployment benefit equivalents via the CDEP scheme. Notwithstanding the signs of improvement in labour force status, rural areas remain structurally disadvantaged compared to urban areas where a much greater proportion of jobs are full-time and award-based.

Income change by gender

The primary cause of the widening gap between indigenous and non-indigenous incomes was a relative decline in the income level of indigenous males. Using figures in Table 14 for nominal mean income in

1986, indigenous male income was 64 per cent of the total mean for the non-indigenous population. By 1991, this proportion had fallen to 62 per cent. In contrast, mean income for indigenous females rose as a proportion of total non-indigenous mean income from 50 per cent in 1986 to 52 per cent in 1991.

Table 14. Change in income status of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by gender: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	Males		Income (\$000s) Females		Total	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Indigenous						
Mean	8.6	12.1	6.6	10.1	7.6	11.1
Median	6.2	8.0	5.6	8.2	5.8	8.1
Non-indigenous						
Mean	17.9	24.7	8.5	13.5	13.3	19.3
Median	16.4	21.9	6.1	10.5	11.3	16.1
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous						
Mean	0.48	0.49	0.78	0.75	0.57	0.58
Median	0.38	0.37	0.92	0.79	0.52	0.51

If these figures are expressed in terms of 1989-90 prices (using a Consumer Price Index of 73.5 in 1985-86 and 105.3 in 1990-91), the real gender-based shift in income is apparent with indigenous male income falling slightly from a real mean of \$11,700 in 1986 to \$11,490 in 1991 and the female equivalent showing a clear counter-tendency by rising from \$8,979 to \$9,591. This convergence in male and female incomes is consistent with the trend revealed by Treadgold (1988) for intercensal periods between 1976-86 and is linked to the better performance of females in sectors of the labour market less affected by the vagaries of the economy. Also, it probably reflects growing gender differentials in the nature of work with indigenous females employed for relatively longer hours and in more skilled employment (Taylor 1993a).

Despite the income gains among indigenous females, they failed to keep up with the rate of growth in income experienced by their non-indigenous counterparts. Nominal mean income for indigenous females, for example, increased by 53 per cent during the intercensal period. Non-indigenous females, on the other hand, increased their mean income by 59 per cent starting from a higher base (Table 14). Thus, ratios of indigenous to non-indigenous income reveal that the gap between female incomes has widened, while that between males has remained relatively unchanged. At the same time, in monetary terms, indigenous females remain behind their

male counterparts with the average income for indigenous females rising by an equivalent amount to that of indigenous males from a lower base.

Welfare dependency

In the AEDP, welfare dependency is equated with dependency on unemployment benefit. Altman and Smith (1993: 21) take the view that this definition is somewhat narrow, reflecting the labour market focus of the AEDP. They take a broader definition of welfare to include all transfer payments from the Federal Government to indigenous citizens. Such a wider definition is also necessitated by the limited availability of official sources of income data for indigenous Australians. At an aggregate level, the most comprehensive indication of the reliance of indigenous people on welfare income is available from census data. This is derived from a cross-tabulation of individual incomes by labour force status. Using this source, Table 15 shows the proportion of total income accruing to each category of the labour force, and to those not in the labour force, in 1986 and 1991.

Table 15. Change in total income of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians by labour force status: Western Australia, 1986-91.

	1986		1991	
	Income (\$ million)	Per cent	Income (\$ million)	Per cent
Indigenous				
Employed	69.6	50.8	119.8	52.7
Unemployed	19.7	14.4	33.1	14.6
Not in the labour force	47.6	34.7	74.1	32.7
Total	137.0	100.0	227.1	100.0
Non-indigenous				
Employed	10,167.5	88.8	15,907.9	87.2
Unemployed	310.6	2.7	743.0	4.1
Not in the labour force	973.1	8.5	1601.3	8.8
Total	11,451.2	100.0	18,252.3	100.0

Overall, there is little change in the contribution of employment income to total income. If anything, a slightly higher proportion of income among the indigenous population derives from employment and slightly less for others. This seems to suggest that the longer-term trend of a decline in employment income relative to total income, noted by Daly and Hawke (1993) for the period 1976-91, has been arrested by improvements in employment income during the most recent intercensal period. However,

the most likely reason for this is the classification of a high proportion of income from the CDEP scheme as employment income and it might be questioned whether income based on citizen entitlements should properly be classified either as employment or non-employment income.

Table 16. Change in mean employment/non-employment income of indigenous and non-indigenous Australians: Western Australia, 1986-91.

Labour force status	Mean income (\$000s)		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Indigenous				
Employed	12.71	16.81	4.10	32.3
Unemployed	5.77	8.78	3.02	52.3
Not in the labour force	5.32	7.87	2.55	47.9
Total	7.68	11.18	3.50	45.6
Non-indigenous				
Employed	17.90	25.09	7.19	40.1
Unemployed	5.66	8.96	3.30	58.3
Not in the labour force	4.23	7.05	2.82	66.6
Total	13.43	19.33	5.90	44.0
Ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous				
Employed	0.71	0.67	-0.04	-5.6
Unemployed	1.02	0.98	-0.04	-3.8
Not in the labour force	1.26	1.12	-0.14	-11.2
Total	0.57	0.58	0.01	1.1

At the same time, even if income from the CDEP scheme is accepted as employment income, the proportion of total income derived from non-welfare sources remains fixed at a level much lower among indigenous people than among the rest of the population (52 per cent in 1991 compared to 87 per cent). From a policy perspective, this provides an essential adjustment to positive interpretations of the relative improvement in labour force status. Thus, the government objective of a reduction in welfare dependency among indigenous people to a level commensurate with that of other Australians is no closer to being achieved in Western Australia than before the introduction of the AEDP.

Actual shifts in mean employment and non-employment incomes are shown in Table 16. The most striking feature is that mean employment income for indigenous people has increased at a considerably slower rate than for others in employment. This is further indicated by the decline in the ratio of indigenous/non-indigenous employment income from 0.71 in 1986 to 0.67 in 1991. As already noted, this is to be expected given that a

substantial share of new employment income for indigenous workers is essentially fixed at a rate roughly equivalent to unemployment benefit (Jobsearch and Newstart allowances). As for welfare income, the mean individual income of unemployed indigenous people in 1986 was \$5,770, which was substantially less than half (45.4 per cent) of the mean income for those in employment. By 1991, this gap had closed somewhat but unemployed indigenous people still had incomes barely more than half of that recorded for people in employment (52 per cent). Furthermore, compared to the non-indigenous population, the ratio of mean income for indigenous people who were unemployed, as well as for those not in the labour force, actually fell.

Policy implications

This analysis of change in the relative economic status of indigenous people in Western Australia during the intercensal period 1986 to 1991 provides the first comprehensive indication of the impacts of the AEDP in the State since it was implemented after 1986. The results, in terms of stated policy objectives, appear to be mixed. On the one hand, employment and unemployment rates among the indigenous population show distinct signs of improvement leading to a closing of the gap in these indicators (albeit slowly) with the rest of the population. On the other hand, when the data are disaggregated by section-of-State and the nature of employment growth is investigated, the achievement is revealed to be a predominantly rural phenomenon due to the introduction of the CDEP scheme at additional locations since the last census.

Contrasting with the expansion of the CDEP scheme, employment in urban-based public and private sector jobs shows a much slower rate of growth. While this runs counter to expectations, given the strength of program efforts to encourage urban employment, it may be that the impact of AEDP public and private sector programs, in the context of a depressed mainstream labour market, has been to simply ameliorate what might otherwise have been a far worse outcome. This proposition cannot be validated from census data alone and requires close scrutiny of DEET's program placement and post program monitoring data in order to examine the precise nature and spatial application of labour market programs, as well as their links with employment outcomes. However, in the relative context of the overall urban labour market, it is clear that indigenous people performed at least as well, if not better, than other job-seekers during the intercensal period and this suggests that focused labour market programs have left their mark.

The relative lack of improvement in the income status of indigenous people in Western Australia in the context of much improved labour force status

emphasises the need for quality, as well as quantity, in job creation schemes if the overall aims of the AEDP are to be achieved. This is given added weight when account is taken of growing income inequality for the population as a whole. Indigenous people appear to lag behind in an economy which is increasingly divided between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. From a labour market perspective, one difficulty continues to be the substantial proportion of indigenous adults of working age who are not in the labour force. This accounts, in large part, for the persistence of a relatively high level of welfare dependence. Also important here is the growth of employment in the CDEP scheme. Given that participation in the scheme involves individuals formerly on unemployment benefit or outside the labour force, it could be argued that the level of welfare dependence is actually higher than revealed by the census. This is because income derived from such employment merely represents the transfer of social security entitlements under a different guise.

Aggregate State-level data showing economic change clearly have the capacity to conceal important intra-State and gender variations. In brief, marginal improvements in labour force status evident at the State level are seen to be reversed for indigenous males in urban areas and enhanced in rural areas. Notwithstanding this, rural incomes remain firmly behind those in urban areas. Likewise, the economic status of indigenous women shows distinct improvement compared to that of men, which in income terms at least, has regressed. This clearly underlines the importance of assessing policy impacts on the economic status of indigenous people at varying scales of analysis and for different sub-groups in the population.

Given a continuation of intercensal trends in economic status among indigenous people in Western Australia a number of outcomes seem likely in the medium term. Given continued growth in CDEP scheme employment, the gap in labour force status between indigenous and non-indigenous residents will further recede but overall, indigenous people will remain half as likely to be in employment and two to three times more likely to be unemployed. Depending on the rate of growth in CDEP scheme participation, dependency on welfare (non-employment) income may show a tendency to decline but levels of such dependency will remain notably higher among indigenous people not least because of sustained lower labour force participation. One unknown factor is whether economic recovery will lead to increased employment in private and public jobs. While much will depend on the pace and nature of employment generation in a revitalised economy, it is clear that special labour market programs and other funding regimes for indigenous organisations will play an important role in securing some involvement by indigenous people given their demonstrated capacity to provide labour market buoyancy even in depressed economic circumstances. Whatever ensues, it is important that quality, and not just quantity, of jobs be the key target of policy. To date,

improvements in labour force status have not impacted on the gap in average incomes. For this to change, indigenous people will need to acquire employment at a faster rate and in positions that provide an income at least commensurate with those obtained by the rest of the workforce.

Notes

1. The ABS sections-of-State within each State and Territory are as follows: major urban - all urban centres with a population of 100,000 and over; other urban - all urban centres with a population of 1,000 to 99,999; bounded locality - all population clusters of 200 to 999 persons; rural balance - the rural remainder of the State or Territory.
2. The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme is a Commonwealth Government program in which unemployed indigenous people of working age forgo their entitlements to payments from the Department of Social Security but receive the equivalent from a local community organisation in return for work. For a full description of the scheme and the policy issues surrounding it, see Altman and Sanders (1991) and Sanders (1993).
3. In estimating mean incomes, the mid-point for each income category has been taken on the assumption that individuals are evenly distributed around this mid-point. The open-ended highest category is problematic, but following Treadgold (1988) it is arbitrarily assumed that the average income received by individuals in this category was one and a half times the lower limit of the highest category. Clearly, estimates of mean incomes will vary according to the upper level adopted. In this analysis the full range of income categories has been utilised with \$50,000+ as the highest category in 1986 and \$70,000+ in 1991.

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