Indigenous Peoples and Indicators of Well-Being: An Australian Perspective on UNPFII Global Frameworks

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Indigenous peoples and indicators of well-being: An Australian perspective on UNPFII Global Frameworks

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ABSTRACT

A version of this paper was presented at a United Nations (UN) workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Indicators of Well-Being held on 22–23 March 2006, in Ottawa. This workshop was one in a series held across the world to canvass appropriate recommendations for the establishment of a core set of global and regional indicators that could then be used by governments, intergovernmental organisations and the UN system when designing and monitoring programs that directly affect indigenous peoples.

This paper outlines current Australian social indicator frameworks, including issues of statistical accountability and the politics of statistics. It discusses aspects of representations of Indigenous culture in formal reporting frameworks, and observes that the development of indicators in cross-cultural settings will always involve a degree of reductionism and a process of translation. The Programme of Action announced for the UN's Second International Decade on the World's Indigenous Peoples sets out a framework of key objectives for achievements during the decade, and this paper deals with the implication for measures of well-being from an Australian perspective. Finally, it is argued that one measure of success—in terms of establishing best practice in this area—is that Indigenous governing bodies begin to assume some responsibility for the compilation of their own measurement indicators and progress in stages to their interpretation, presentation, replication, and dissemination with the ultimate goal of their application for local planning.

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INTRODUCTION

In accordance with United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council decision 2003/300, a workshop on data collection and disaggregation for Indigenous peoples was convened by the secretariat of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in 2004 (UN 2004). A key finding was the lack of data referring to Indigenous peoples in the reporting frameworks of UN and other intergovernmental organisations, as well as a failure of existing indicators to adequately reflect the perspectives and aspirations of Indigenous peoples. As a follow-up to the recommendations of that gathering, the UNPFII moved to convene a series of regional workshops to canvass appropriate recommendations for the establishment of a core set of global and regional indicators that could then be used by governments, intergovernmental organisations and the UN system when designing and monitoring programs that directly affect Indigenous peoples.

This paper was initially prepared as a submission to first of these workshops focused on Indigenous peoples in Australasia, North America and Russia. As a preamble, it should be noted that some of the issues addressed in the following discussion were the subject of a prior paper that assessed findings from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) conducted in Australia in 2002 (Altman & Taylor 2006). Accordingly, some elements of what follows draw from that source.

CURRENT AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL INDICATOR FRAMEWORKS

Over the last three years in particular, Indigenous affairs policy at the national level in Australia has changed direction dramatically: the central tenets of policy have shifted from terms such as self-determination, self-management and national Indigenous representation and advocacy to mainstreaming, mutual obligation, shared responsibility and a whole-of-government approach. This broad change in direction has been predicated in large measure on a widespread perception that the socioeconomic situation of Indigenous people in Australia has at worst been evidence of policy failure over the past 30 years, or at best has not improved fast enough.

The new approach has been based on a growing emphasis on what has been termed 'practical reconciliation', or the pursuit of statistical equality between the standard of living of Indigenous and other Australians in the areas of health, housing, education and employment. To measure progress towards these goals, the government has instituted a reporting framework via the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (SCRCSS) to inform the Council of Australian Governments about change in key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage.

Before proceeding, it is worth reminding ourselves of precisely what social indicators are. Social indicators are aggregated summary statistics that reflect aspects of the social condition or quality of life of a society or social subgroup. They are typically employed in evaluation research, which refers more to a research purpose than a research method—that purpose being to evaluate the impact of social interventions, or actions taken within a social context for the purpose of producing some intended result. As noted, in the Australian context, from the government side, this result is focused heavily on the achievement of statistical equality.

UN: United Nations

UNPFII: UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

NATSISS: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey

SCRCSS: Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision

Thus, the reporting framework draws heavily on socioeconomic indicators from census and survey sources and is now available on a biannual basis as the Productivity Commission Report *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*. In addition, the annual *Report on Government Services* issued by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) now includes a separate compendium of Indigenous statistics drawn from the administrative databases of Australian, State and Territory governments. Accordingly, this focuses more on the performance of specified federal and State government agencies and programs in delivering services to Indigenous people within their jurisdiction.

The reporting framework for the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report is constructed around a very explicit causal model of Indigenous disadvantage highlighting the domestic settings of child rearing and the interactions between family and schooling based around three Priority Outcomes:

- Safe, healthy and supportive environments with strong communities and cultural identity
- Positive child development and prevention of violence, crime and self-harm, and
- Improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities.

These outcomes are informed by several Headline Indicators:

- Life expectancy at birth
- Rates of disability
- Years 10 and 12 school retention
- Post-secondary participation and attainment
- Labour force participation and unemployment
- Household and individual income
- Home ownership
- Suicide and self-harm
- Child protection notifications
- Deaths from homicide and hospitalisations for assault
- Victim rates for crime, and
- Imprisonment and juvenile detention.

These in turn are underpinned by seven Strategic Areas for Action:

- Early childhood development and growth
- Early school engagement and performance
- Positive childhood and transition to adulthood
- Substance use and misuse
- Functional and resilient families and communities
- Effective environmental health systems, and
- Economic participation and development.

These criteria lead finally to a detailed set of Strategic Change Indicators, too numerous to list here but including such measures as birth weight, literacy, care and protection orders, substance use, and housing occupancy.

With regard to the assessment of indicator gaps, it is worth noting that these two government reporting frameworks overlap substantially in content (though not always in specificity), with the socioeconomic components of the UN Millennium Development Goal Indicator framework, the Commission on Sustainable

Table 1. ABS Indigenous household surveys program: 1994–2011

Year	Collection	Indigenous sample	Level of geography supported
1994	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey	17,000 persons	ATSIC Regions
1995	National Health Survey	Indigenous sample of 2,168 persons	National
1996	Population Census Indigenous Enumeration Strategy	All persons	Small geographic regions
1999	National Housing Survey	850–900 households	National
1999	Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey	All discrete Indigenous communities (approx. 1,300)	Community level
2001	National Health Survey	Indigenous sample of 2,800 persons	National
2001	Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey	All discrete Indigenous communities (approx. 1,300)	Community level
2001	Population Census Indigenous Enumeration Strategy	All persons	Small geographic regions
2002	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey	9,400 persons	States
2004-5	Indigenous Health Survey	11,000 persons	States
2006	Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey	All discrete Indigenous communities (approx. 1,300)	Community level
2006	Population Census Indigenous Enumeration Strategy	All persons	Small geographic regions
2008	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey	9,400 persons	States
2010-11	Indigenous Health Survey	11,000 persons	States
2011	Population Census Indigenous Enumeration Strategy	All persons	Small geographic regions

Development Theme Indicator framework, and the Human Development Index. In addition, the structure of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* framework with Headline Indicators leading to detailed Strategic Change Indicators is also consistent with the Danish International Development Agency (Danida) toolkit for including indigenous peoples in sector programme support in calling for an information pyramid that, at the lower levels, provides disaggregated indicators and describes interrelationships with underlying problems (Danida 2004: 16). To this extent, the Australian reporting framework presents relatively few gaps.

Alongside these efforts, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) play pivotal roles in the regular collection and dissemination of Indigenous statistics. Aside from providing the full range of Indigenous population characteristics from the five-yearly national census (via a self-identification question), the ABS also has an extensive household and community survey program mapped out for the current decade (Table 1). The origins of this program can be traced to the need for a government response to the findings of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Sims 1992). This response is recognition of the need for non-standard approaches to developing Indigenous census and survey content and methodology, though with less emphasis on direct Indigenous participation and control than is evident in some other recent surveys, notably the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey (Zubrick et al. 2004).

The significance of these activities is highlighted by the fact that up to the 1970s official government processes in Australia served to exclude, devalue, and deter full Indigenous statistical representation. By contrast, the contemporary politics of data collection seek to encourage inclusion via self-identification. This is manifest most recently in the greater involvement of Indigenous personnel in the collection of census and survey data, as well as in ministerial-level agreements for the adoption of a standard self-reported Indigenous status question in all administrative data collections. In addition, as Walter (2004) points out, the ABS has embarked on a new Indigenous Community Engagement Strategy aimed at enhancing the involvement of Indigenous people and communities in data gathering and use. Thus, the issues in Australia are now are less to do with overcoming exclusion from statistical collections and more to do with ensuring that Indigenous people take the opportunity to identify themselves in administrative data sets. In the latter context, a major issue surrounds the incompatibility of statistical numerators and denominators in the calculation of population rates, and the impact of the under-registration of vital events for estimating important indicators such as life expectancy.

Despite the obviously heightened exposure of issues related to Indigenous statistics in Australia, many gaps in essential information remain. These arise not so much because data do not exist, but rather because appropriate Indigenous planning frameworks within which to rationalise and organise data compilation and dissemination, (especially in regard to data from administrative collections) are generally lacking. Indigenous commentators are sensitive to this lacuna and have questioned the adequacy of official statistics in the evaluation of government policy (Calma 2005; McCausland 2005), and in supporting the aspirations of particular groupings of Indigenous people (for example, Torres Strait Islanders Arabena (2005) and the Indigenous Nations of the Murray-Darling Basin (Taylor & Biddle 2004)).

Viewed historically then, there appears to be a growing gap between the scales at which Indigenous polities either seek to or are required to organise and plan, on the one hand, and the scales for which statistics are available on the other (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2005: 208). Thus, while there has been an undeniable and substantial rise in data gathering activity, the information that this has generated tends to be available mostly for National and State jurisdiction level analysis and/or broad remoteness distinctions. There are a number of methodological, practical, and ultimately political dimensions to this observation.

Danida:
Danish International Development Agency

ABS:
Australian Bureau of Statistics

AIHW:
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Firstly, from a methodological perspective, sample survey instruments such as the customised NATSISS are best suited to informing high level policy discussion about the broad nature of interrelationships between social circumstances and outcomes—does crime impede employment prospects? Is health related to income? Do educated women have fewer children? For reasons of sample size and non-response error, they are not suited to establishing absolute levels of need for comparisons over time, nor for disaggregating measures of need for particular regions or population sub-groups. There is a trade-off here between spatial detail and the robustness of survey results that runs counter to the scale at which data are increasingly required (Calma 2005).

Secondly, from a practical perspective, in terms of gathering administrative data, a combination of under-reporting, confidentiality provisions, and the guarded nature of bureaucratic processes renders the acquisition of data at sub-national levels logistically problematic to the point where either very little is made available or intense effort is required to extract even the most basic indicators (Taylor & Stanley 2005).

Finally, from a statistical perspective, the current paradigm for the collection and dissemination of Indigenous statistics is suited to the measurement and reporting of gaps. For the most part this assists processes of governmentality by state bureaucrats, and strongly reflects a deficit model of Indigenous socioeconomic need as measured by standard social indicators. It does not necessarily inform a community development or community governance model and therefore suffers from all the pitfalls of averaging diverse circumstances, leading to questions about the utility of data for Indigenous regional and community organisations and their members (Altman & Taylor 2006). This raises a related issue (first flagged by Walter (2004) at the New York Workshop on Data Collection and Disaggregation for Indigenous Peoples) to do with the degree of involvement of Indigenous stakeholders in deciding what data are collected.

From 1990 to 2005 there were some checks and balances on the increased government activity in the area of Indigenous data collection provided by the existence of representative Indigenous regional structures via the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). It is noteworthy, for example, that under s.7 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989*, the ABS and ATSIC had a statutory relationship and that ATSIC was legally required to develop policy proposals to meet Indigenous needs and priorities from the national to the regional level. ATSIC was also required to assist, advise and cooperate with Indigenous communities, organisations and individuals, again down to its representative regional level. Irrespective of ATSIC's capacity to effectively address such complex statutory functions, as a national and regional representative organisation it did provide a degree of institutional authorisation to the Indigenous data collection and analysis activities of the ABS and other government agencies.

ATSIC:
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Thus, the recent abolition of ATSIC by the Australian government represents the extinguishment of an important legally sanctioned, representative and regionalised Indigenous statistical data collection and dissemination agency (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2005: 207). With ATSIC's demise, questions now arise as to what geographic scales of reporting should be adopted, and with whom governments should/could engage in order to ensure Indigenous input and legitimisation for its reporting framework.

In the meantime, there is no doubt that the government's reporting framework is already playing a role in broadly assessing Indigenous policy and practice using a combination of census, survey and administrative data. The key task as defined by the SCRGSP is to identify indicators that are of relevance to all governments and Indigenous stakeholders and that can demonstrate the impact of program and policy interventions. However, it remains unclear how this actually demonstrates the impacts of program and policy interventions, as rigorous evaluations of specific policies targeting Indigenous Australians do not appear in the SCRGSP report and are largely missing in Indigenous policy discussions. It is generally

recognised that interventions cannot be evaluated by comparing broad undifferentiated social indicator outcomes over time: programs and policies have to be evaluated at the micro target group community or regional level, and there is little independent analysis of this nature in Australia today.

At one level, this situation is anomalous. Although the recent focus of Indigenous policy has been on highly targeted regional sites for trialing whole-of-government initiatives, along with the development of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) and planned Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs), none of these have clearly defined evaluation mechanisms and associated specified data requirements (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2005: 193–202). A notable exception here is the research undertaken at the Thamarrurr trial site by Taylor (2004) and Taylor and Stanley (2005) to gather baseline information that might inform evaluation. However, the intensity of effort required to compile information at this level of disaggregation is instructive of an overall problem—that the labour-intensive mechanisms necessary to bridge this emerging information gap are generally not in place.
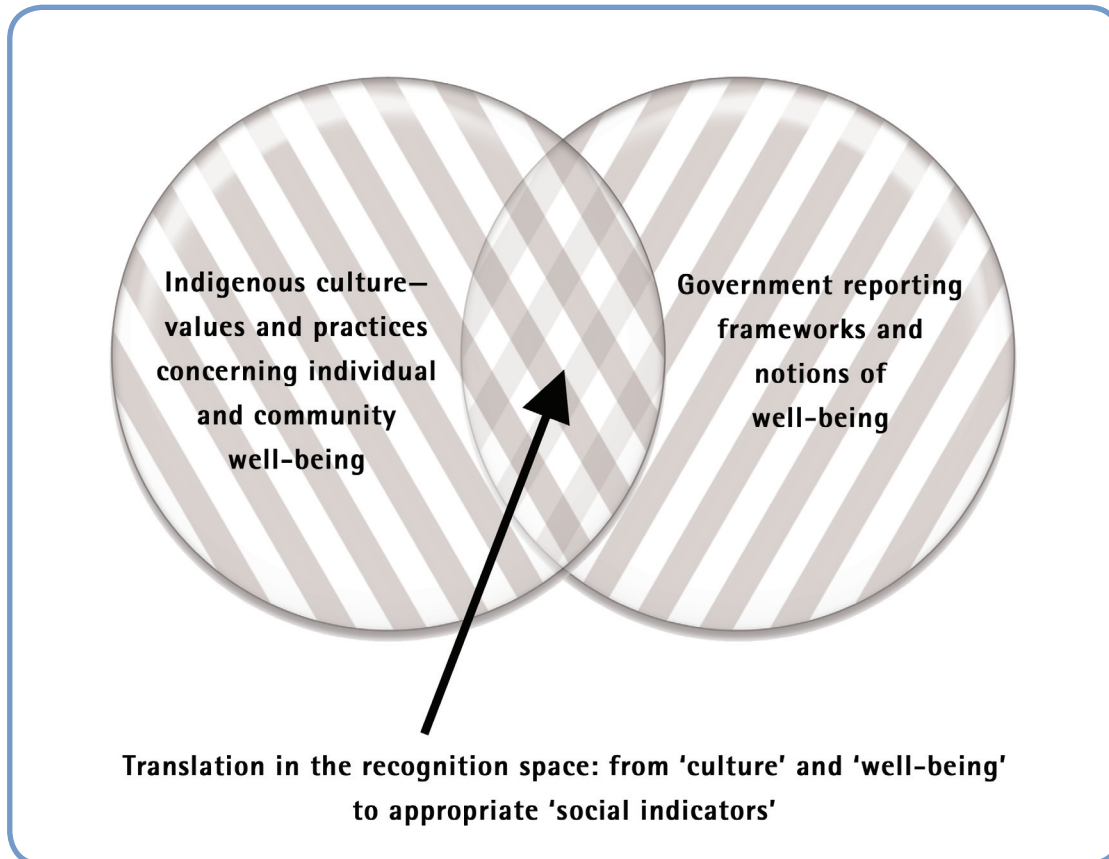
In light of the ABS's own formal evaluation of the first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey in 1994, this last observation is significant. Among the key issues highlighted in this evaluation were the appropriateness of output mediums and the accessibility of results to Australia's Indigenous people and their organisations (Sarossy 1996). Findings on these matters raised the importance of regional level reporting and recommended that the dissemination strategy for any future survey should ensure that the results are readily available to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. To ensure this, it was recommended that the ABS consider delivering basic statistical training in the interpretation of results to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Sarossy 1996: 192).

Yet, as noted, there appears to be a growing mismatch between the broad direction that Indigenous affairs policy is taking—focusing effort on partnerships with specific regions, communities and even families—and the availability or reportage of information (except from the five-yearly census), at these detailed levels. This raises important issues of statistical accountability and the politics of statistics. Today, what is framed by government as a new partnership approach exists in Indigenous affairs in Australia, but invariably the statistical basis for assessing its effectiveness is lacking for want of appropriate scales of analysis and reporting. It is also clear that there is an emerging hierarchy of privileged access to such data, ranging from the ABS and government departments who are uniquely positioned to access Unit Record Files, to others like government departments and academics and consulting agencies who can purchase data and who tend to have the technical capacity to utilise new remote access data laboratory facilities, and then Indigenous organisations and individuals who appear least well placed to access (and then analyse) information. While this latter may constitute a gap in capacity as much as anything else, it is a gap that has probably been exacerbated by the abolition of an emergent Indigenous bureaucratic cadre in the form of ATSIC.

INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND MEASUREMENT

The goals and means to measuring practical reconciliation/mainstreaming as outlined above implicitly downplay the significance of different Indigenous priorities and world views. Not surprisingly, then, a consistent message to emerge from consultations conducted by the SCRGSP with select Indigenous people and organisations is the need to improve representations of Indigenous culture in formal reporting frameworks (SCRGSP 2005: 2.11). Although no explanation is provided by the SCRGSP as to what precisely is meant by the term 'culture', a basic dilemma to emerge from these consultations is the difficulty of identifying single indicators given the diversity of Indigenous circumstances and societies across Australia. It is also asserted that where there is a breakdown of culture (for example in the loss of language), then disadvantage is likely to be greater. Again, some lack of clarity is evident here. If disadvantage is measured

SRA:
Shared
Responsibility
Agreement

RPA:
Regional
Partnership
Agreement

Fig. 1. The recognition space for indicators of indigenous well-being

Indigenous culture—
values and practices
concerning individual
and community
well-being

Government reporting
frameworks and
notions of
well-being

**Translation in the recognition space: from 'culture' and 'well-being'
to appropriate 'social indicators'**

Adapted from Mantziaris and Martin (2000).

by standard social indicators then many of the areas of Australia where Indigenous language is intact are also the ones with the worst socioeconomic outcomes. If disadvantage is measured according to Indigenous perceptions of well-being, however, then loss of language is invariably considered disadvantageous.

The fact is, whatever sentiments exist regarding the lack of representation of culture in official indicators, there is an overriding constraint on the construction of objective indices in so far as they are directed primarily at informing government, and not necessarily Indigenous, culture and processes. In response, the SCRGSP recognises the need to identify indicators that best meet the criteria of government (e.g. that indicators be amenable to policy action) whilst at the same time having widespread relevance to Indigenous peoples. Ultimately what is sought, then, is similar to the mechanism for illuminating the nature of native title for public discourse in Australia in terms of a 'recognition, or translation, space' that exists where traditional Indigenous law and custom and Australian property law intersect (Mantziaris & Martin 2000). This conceptualisation of a recognition space may be adapted to the area of social indicator development as illustrated in Fig. 1.

As inferred from the diagram, much of what constitutes important aspects of Indigenous (or any other) culture such as world views, appropriate structures of social relationships, land relationships, kinship rights and obligations, reciprocities and accountabilities (Martin 1995; Schwab 1995)—in effect, different ways of life—is not necessarily brought to the level of public discourse (the intersect), and is therefore not easily amenable to measurement. Even where measurement appears possible, distinct modes of Indigenous living and aspiration may be incommensurate with the broad goals of government policy to the point where they

defy common interpretation. For example, in the Australian context there is a clear contradiction between the desire of many Indigenous people to live in remote areas in small dispersed communities on traditional lands, and the general thrust of government policy that is intent on securing Indigenous participation in the mainstream urban economy as the core means to enhance well-being. By the same token, elements of government reporting (certainly when it comes down to particular strategic change measures) may have little connection to Indigenous concerns and practices. An especially poignant example of this is provided by outputs from the Australian census which, because they are designed to represent the circumstances of mainstream Australia, generate results for Indigenous peoples in remote settings that can at times appear nonsensical (Morphy 2004). In addition, important elements of Indigenous economic activity, for example, can be overlooked entirely (Altman 2005; Altman et al. 2006), a problem noted for other indigenous populations in developed country settings (Usher et al. 2003).

The main focus of the diagram, though, is on the cross-sectional space, or area of intersection, where policy makers and Indigenous people can seek to build meaningful engagement and measurement. This is the area that allows for a necessarily reductionist translation of Indigenous people's own perceptions of their well-being into measurable indices sought by government. What is captured in this space is obviously far from the totality of Indigenous understandings of well-being, a point noted before in respect of Australian survey data (Peterson 1996).

In contemplating the likely content of this recognition space, the SCRGSP (2005: 2.11–2.15) highlights three categories of potential indicators that it believes meet this test of appropriate cultural measurement: the practice of culture by Indigenous people; the formal recognition of Indigenous culture; and appreciation of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous people. Some of the specific indicators that are available or suggested as applicable within these three categories include:

- the presence/absence of Indigenous cultural studies in school curricula and the involvement of Indigenous people in development and delivery of Indigenous studies (*data currently limited*)

- participation in Indigenous cultural activities (*the NATSISS survey includes questions on type of cultural events attended and payment for cultural activities such as art and dance*)

- proportion of people with access to traditional lands (*the NATSISS includes questions on persons recognising homelands, living on homelands and allowed to visit homelands. It also asks about identification with clan, tribal/language group. Data on Indigenous owned or controlled land holdings is available via title deed processes, while the National Native Title Tribunal also records details of Indigenous Land Use Agreements along with claims and determinations claims regarding native title*)

- case studies in governance arrangements focusing on leadership, self-determination, capacity building, and cultural match

- Indigenous language use (*data are available from the NATSISS*)

- observance of Indigenous protocols, and

- cross-cultural training programs for government employees.

The essential point here is that without a common agreed view of different and shared perceptions of well-being, the danger is that indicators become ethnocentric and the notion that Indigenous people may have their own life projects is obscured by the pressing moral and political objective of achieving statistical equality that comes with the policies of practical reconciliation and mainstreaming (Peterson 2005). In working through these questions, we should be mindful that from an Indigenous perspective the very notion of measurement may carry with it the spectre of state control, and that the implications of who is measuring what, for whom, and to what end is crucial. As Smith (1999: 1–2) clearly explains from

a Maori perspective, '[The] collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which the knowledge about Indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized'. To the extent that the development of indicators is concerned with enhancing the tools for positivist inquiry in the interaction between governments and indigenous peoples then again, as Smith (1999: 173–8) reminds us, this cross-cultural encounter involves more than just a recognition of difference—it requires the development of models of bi-cultural or partnership research involving negotiated design, methodologies and outcomes.

Similar concerns with respect to the new indicators framework in Australia have already been expressed by Indigenous commentators. For example, Arabena (2005) sees the attempt to reduce the complexity of Indigenous circumstances to measurable indicators as neither ideologically nor theoretically innocent, with the process of simplification embodying both the expectations and beliefs of responsible technicians and officials. Dodson (2005) goes further in arguing that selected indicators can't just be based on what government agencies consider success to look like—they have to focus on developing Indigenous measures of success. Part of the means to this lies in ensuring effective full participation of Indigenous people in all stages of data collection and analysis as an essential component of participatory development practice (Calma 2005).

TOWARDS APPROPRIATE INDICATORS

The discussion so far has argued that the development of indicators in cross-cultural settings will always involve a degree of reductionism and a process of translation. What is important to ensure is that this reductionism is negotiated and that the sets of indicators developed are seen as legitimate and appropriate by all stakeholders. In considering just what this might mean, in a practical sense, we can turn for guidance to the Programme of Action announced for the UN's Second International Decade on the World's Indigenous Peoples. This sets out the framework for what the UN and related international agencies, governments and Indigenous peoples should seek to achieve during the decade. Among the key objectives outlined are:

- Promoting non-discrimination and inclusion of Indigenous people in laws, policies and programs at all levels

- Promoting the full and effective participation of Indigenous people in decisions that directly or indirectly affect them and to do so in accordance with the principle of free, prior and informed consent

- Adopting targets for improving the situation of Indigenous peoples, and

- Redefining development processes to ensure that they recognise the cultural diversity of Indigenous peoples

We can make use of this negotiated and agreed platform to consider the appropriate formulation of a core set of quantitative and qualitative global and regional indicators of Indigenous well-being as sought by the workshop. Each of these is dealt with in turn with select indicator examples drawn from an Australian perspective.

PROMOTING NON-DISCRIMINATION AND INCLUSION

Issues regarding the promotion of non-discrimination and inclusion of Indigenous people in laws, policies and programs at all levels have been the subject of some interest within Australia in recent years. In particular, there has been a trend of declining recruitment levels and falling retention rates for Indigenous

employment in the Australian Public Service and this is considered a critical issue as it reduces the ability of policy and program agencies to draw on the perspectives and abilities of a diverse workforce that reflects the needs and views of Indigenous peoples (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2004: 120). What this demonstrates is the value of data on the level and nature of Indigenous employment in policy and program areas of government based on Indigenous self-identification in personnel records.

PROMOTING FULL AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION

The second objective of the Programme of Action raises issues to do more directly with Indigenous governance. This is not the same as 'government'. 'Government' means having a jurisdictional control, whereas 'governance' is about having the processes and institutional capacity to be able to exercise that control through sound decision-making. Good 'governance', on the other hand, is all about the means to establish this with the ultimate aim of achieving the social, cultural, and economic developments sought by citizens (Dodson & Smith 2003; Dodson 2006).

ARC:

Australia Research Council

In outlining a methodological and conceptual framework for the Indigenous Community Governance project funded by the Australia Research Council (ARC), Smith (2005) has identified a dozen key dimensions of governance that provide a starting point for assessing practical applications of what is in many ways a nebulous concept.[1] In all but four of these, the development of a statistical base for planning involving local participation is found to be an essential element. To highlight the important scope of regional data collection in providing for good governance, it is worth listing, as a summary device, the particular dimensions identified by this project that benefit from regional statistical input. These include:

- Cultural geography (governance and planning should be based on the local social geography such as concerning family groups, clans with information collected on this basis)

- Decision-making (locally generated indicators enhance the capacity to make evidence-based informed decisions)

- Organisational performance (data is required for effective service delivery)

- Strategic direction (projections of future population numbers/characteristics provide for the development of long-term perspectives)

- Participation and voice (information dissemination raises stakeholder awareness both internally and externally)

- Resource governance (data on human capital resources informs economic development potential)

- The governance environment (data on fiscal flows illuminates the impact of wider state and national relationships), and

- Governance capacity (participation in data collection, analysis, application and dissemination builds local capacity).

Such indicators assist in the performance of good governance by enhancing local understanding of social and economic circumstances as a basis for sound and strategic decision-making and engagement with government. In one Australian example of how such measurement has worked for Indigenous people (Taylor 2004, 2005; Taylor & Stanley 2005), the bringing together of customised social indicators in partnership

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1. The Indigenous Community Governance Project is an Australian Research Council Linkage Project between the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) and Reconciliation Australia. The Project is exploring the nature of Indigenous community governance in diverse contexts and locations across Australia through a series of case studies.

with local people has provided a platform for effective discussion with government over the resourcing of local development priorities in the Thamarrurr Region of the Northern Territory. The vision of the Thamarrurr Regional Council in the preamble to its constitution states:

> Thamarrurr is responsible for the way of life of our people. This way of life is expressed as the spirit of our people. This spirit is expressed through family life. Family life is our relationship to kin and country. Responsibility for good family life has always belonged with the elders.

> Thamarrurr, with authority of pulen pulen (elder men) and muthingan (elder women), provides direction for this way of life. Many decisions are carried out through kardu keke (the middle aged people) for the benefit of our people. This is our way of doing business.

In effect, when asked by government what is was they wanted, *kardu keke* found a compelling need for an information base that they could control. There are now attempts to formalise this via the establishment of a locally-staffed Thamarrurr Regional Education and Information Office to perform a data collection, analysis and dissemination role.

Of course, governance concerns range much wider than this, though evidence from the Harvard project on American Indian Governance and from the ANU-based ARC Indigenous Community Governance Project suggests that these may be reduced to one of four key principles: legitimacy, power, resources and accountability (Cornell 1993; Begay, Cornell, & Kalt 1998; Dodson & Smith 2003). These principles are also reflected in the United Nations Development Programme's core governance indicator areas that include: parliamentary development, electoral systems, justice and human rights, e-governance and access to information, decentralisation, and public administration reform and anti-corruption. The suggestion here is that these core areas could be used as a basis for more concrete indicator selection.

ADOPTING TARGETS

The adoption of targets for improving the situation of Indigenous peoples is one issue that has drawn a response from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner in discussions over the Australian government's reporting framework on Indigenous disadvantage (Calma 2005). Casting this in a human rights approach, governments, working in partnership with Indigenous peoples, are required to demonstrate that they are approaching issues of equality of opportunity in a targeted manner and are accountable to the achievement of defined goals within a defined timeframe. This is referred to as the 'progressive realisation' principle. According to Calma (2005), indicator frameworks such as that devised by the Australian government should be supplemented by appropriate targets or benchmarks that are negotiated by governments and Indigenous peoples. This would take reporting to a new level by requiring that governments make justification if there is no improvement on some indicators and, where there is improvement, justify whether the progress achieved is at a sufficient rate. As an example of this, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has recently called on the governments of Australia to commit to achieving equality of health status and life expectation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous people within 25 years (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner 2005: 16).

REDEFINING DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

In current Australian debate, the redefinition of development processes to ensure that recognition of the cultural diversity of Indigenous peoples is mostly focused around the extent to which the state is prepared to support Indigenous peoples who choose to settle at remote localities close to, or on, lands that they own. Recent pronouncements by government question the social and economic viability of remote settlements against the task of satisfying its own criteria for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. For

Altman and Rowse (2005) this presents, in sharp relief, a fundamental question at the heart of Indigenous affairs policy: should the goals of Indigenous affairs policy be to achieve equality of socioeconomic status or to facilitate choice and self-determination? As they point out, the former tends to imply integration and urban migration, while the latter may require adherence to different life worlds and resistance to transformation. Either way, this is one area where indicators may signal conflicting outcomes.

Take, for example, the number of Indigenous people living on homelands as an indicator of the cultural diversity of Indigenous peoples, as is available from the Australian NATSISS. Where this number is high and/or rising, it may be seen by Indigenous peoples as a positive measure of cultural strength enabling the preservation and development of cultural practices, and the maintenance of sacred sites and biological diversity. On the other hand, governments may view this as a negative outcome rendering all the more difficult their attempts to achieve statistical equality in other more socioeconomic indicators, even where empirical evidence (for example in the area of health outcomes) might suggest otherwise (McDermott et al. 1998). This sort of conundrum highlights the importance of negotiation in the recognition space of Fig. 1.

While many of the available indicators in this area in Australia seem associated in some way with access to land and sea (such as Indigenous participation in and resourcing for natural resource management programs), other less obvious indicators might be more process-oriented, such as the degree to which government programs support or hinder Indigenous extended family arrangements through housing and welfare policy.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that indigenous peoples' perceptions and understandings of well-being extend beyond, and sometimes conflict with, many of the indicators currently adopted by global reporting frameworks. At the same time, the physical coverage of indigenous peoples in official statistical collections is incomplete. Globally, in the early twenty-first century there remains no single and unambiguous operational definition of indigenous populations, although attempts at demarcation tend to follow four guiding principles:

• Indigenous peoples include descendants of the original inhabitants of a country

• Who have become encapsulated in their lands by a numerically and politically dominant invasive society

• Who retain cultural difference from that society, and

• Who self-identify as indigenous.

In describing the demographic features of indigenous peoples, this last criterion is most crucial. For indigenous peoples to exist at all, in a statistical sense, requires both administrative mechanisms in place to ascribe and record indigenous status, and a willingness on the part of indigenous people to be counted. The degree to which these prerequisites combine to enable the compilation of demographic data varies enormously, both historically and between nations. Consequently, the statistical basis for a consistent global description of indigenous demography remains tenuous at best. Even with relatively robust and comprehensive data on indigenous peoples in place, as in the new world countries of Australasia and North America, this encapsulates only a small estimated share of the global total indigenous population—4.4 million or 1.5% in 2000 (Taylor 2003).

However, notwithstanding the degree of availability of indicator data, the more salient point is that the data often have drawbacks in terms of providing a meaningful representation of the social and economic status and interpretations of well-being of indigenous people. In Australia, for example, there have long

been concerns about the cultural relevance of information obtained from instruments principally designed to establish the characteristics of mainstream Australian life. Socioeconomic status, for example, would seem an unproblematic concept—in western society this is generally measured by indicators such as cash income and levels and ownership of assets. However, among many indigenous peoples this can also be determined by access to ritual or religious knowledge rather than to material resources. Similarly, economic status can be accrued by controlling the distribution of material resources rather than being an accumulator (or owner) of resources. In short, for indigenous peoples, materialistic considerations may be of less importance than reciprocity in economic relations (Schwab 1995).

As Riedmann (1993) so clearly illustrates in her critique of the Changing African Family-Nigeria projects, the real challenge for statisticians is how to achieve measurement whilst respecting (and incorporating) the cultural integrity of subjects. Despite the fact that demographers, for one, were warned some years ago of an imbalance between their concern for statistical precision and detail on the one hand, and their casualness of treatment of non-demographic contextual variables on the other (McNicoll 1988: 20), it seems that this message has yet to permeate very far. In terms of measuring indigenous well-being, the key responsibility on governments is to ensure that this is fully informed by indigenous agency.

Thus, one measure of success in terms of establishing best practice in this area is that indigenous governing bodies begin to assume some responsibility in partnership with official agencies for the compilation of measurement indicators, and then progress in stages to their interpretation, presentation, replication, and dissemination with the ultimate goal of their application for local planning. As with many aspects of indigenous life, information gathering and interpretation is all too often done *for* indigenous communities *by* non-indigenous outsiders. What the Australian experience suggests is that greater emphasis should be given to appropriate resourcing, training and skills development for local personnel, both to build internal capacity for measurement and as an essential component of community development. What this flags is that, alongside the task of recommending a core set of global and regional indicators for use within the UN system and by governments, there is a need to ensure that processes emerge to better facilitate the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the development of statistics that purport to represent them.

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