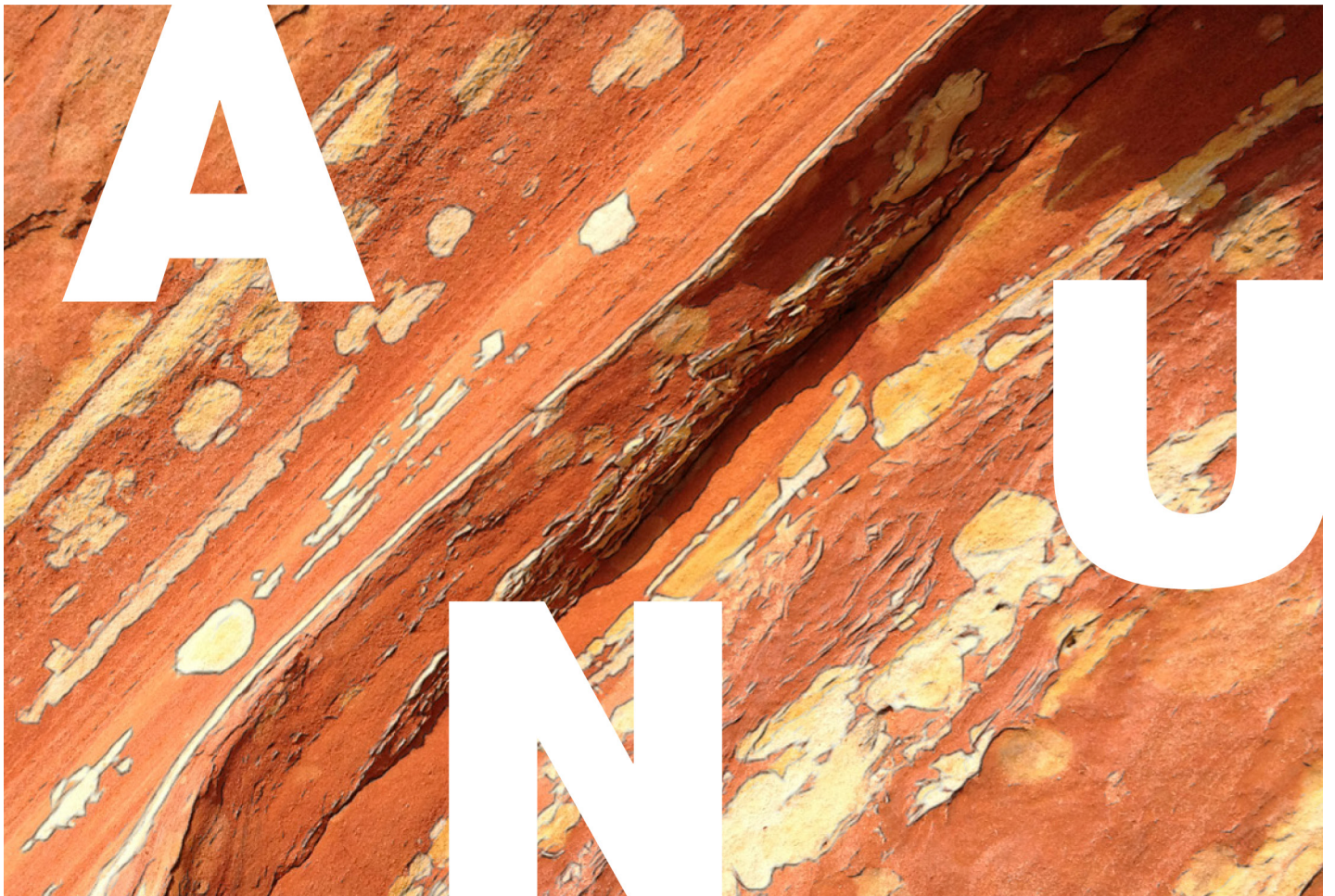




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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FOR  
SUSTAINABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD  
CARE AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS:  
A WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA AND  
CENTRAL LAND COUNCIL PARTNERSHIP

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Aboriginal Economic  
Policy Research  
ANU College of  
**Arts & Social  
Sciences**

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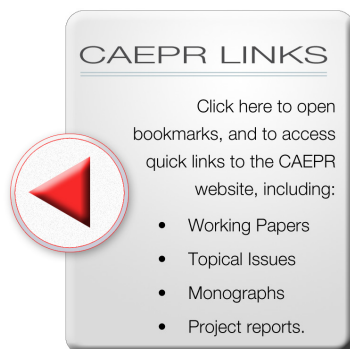
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# Community development for sustainable early childhood care and development programs: A World Vision Australia and Central Land Council partnership

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## Abstract

This paper outlines the final case study in a research project which examines how international development non-government organisations (NGOs) conduct their work with Aboriginal organisations and communities in Australia. I was keen to explore how international NGOs working with Indigenous communities and community organisations reflected the community development (or bottom-up) approaches which both the Indigenous sector and the international NGO sector favour. This is in contrast to the service delivery (or top-down) approach more common in government funded programs. I also wanted to investigate the 'partnerships' operating between international NGOs and Indigenous organisations or programs. 'Partnership' has become a word used to mean almost any type of relationship between organisations, so I wanted to explore what 'partnership' meant in these cases. An introduction to this research and two previous case studies were reported in *CAEPR Working Paper No. 71*, 'Partnerships for Indigenous development: International development NGOs, Aboriginal organisations and communities'. My final case study describes an international NGO and Aboriginal organisations involved in a partnership. It examines some of the features of this partnership and the program, and draws some conclusions about what have been important factors in its achievements to date. The study also highlights some of the challenges this partnership faces and concludes with some questions about the extent to which an international NGO can influence the wider social and political environment which is affecting Aboriginal development in Central Australia.

**Keywords:** Indigenous community organisations; community development; international development; non-government organisations; partnership.

## Acknowledgments

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## Acronyms

ANU	The Australian National University
BIITE	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
CLC	Central Land Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development (program)
FaFT	Families as First Teachers
NGO	non-government organisation
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
NTG	Northern Territory Government
NT DET	Northern Territory Department of Education
WETT	Warlpiri Education and Training Trust
WpkJ	Warlpiri-patu-kurlangu Jaru
WV	World Vision (the partnership as a whole)
WVA	World Vision Australia
WVI	World Vision International (the International partnership secretariat, based in the United States)



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## Introduction

This research reports on the last of three case studies to document a small number of the approaches which international non-government organisations (NGOs) are using in undertaking community development work with Indigenous communities and organisations. Internationally there is both a great deal of experience and extensive literature on development approaches to address poverty and exclusion. Yet the discourses of development and the lessons from international development practice are rarely heard in the context of addressing the poor socioeconomic situation of Indigenous Australians. It is in this context that this study was undertaken: to explore how international development agencies worked in Indigenous Australia, how they drew on their international development approaches, the extent to which these were applicable in Indigenous Australian contexts, and how successful these partnerships with Indigenous organisations were.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the extent to which the partnership between the NGO World Vision Australia (WVA) and an Indigenous organisation, the Central Land Council (CLC), is succeeding both in terms of the program design and in terms of the nature of the partnership between the international development NGO and the Indigenous organisation. The partnership, established in 2007, involves WVA undertaking community development work in early childhood care and development within the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) Project managed by the CLC's Community Development Unit. In doing so they are working closely with the Warlpiri-patu-kurlangu Jaru (WpkJ) Indigenous education organisation. Unlike other case studies in this research project (Hunt 2010), in this instance, the Indigenous organisation has contracted the international development NGO to carry out community development work within one of its major projects. This is a different relationship from the two partnerships previously documented; in those cases the Indigenous organisation received a grant from the international development NGO.

The main part of the research was carried out during the second half of 2010 and early 2011, by document analysis, field interviews with CLC and WVA staff, WETT early childhood workers and other stakeholders in Alice Springs. It also involved observation and discussions with WETT workers and community members in Willowra, face to face or telephone interviews with former CLC and current WVA staff. Phone interviews were also conducted with a small number of other people who were not available in Alice Springs at the time of my visits. For over a year I tried to meet with the eight key WpkJ women as a group in Alice Springs, but due to meeting postponements and

**FIG. 1. World Vision Australia's mission and the core values of the WV partnership**

World Vision Australia's mission is 'to be a Christian organisation that engages people to eliminate poverty and its causes.'

The World Vision partnership's six core values:

- we are Christian
- we are committed to the poor
- we value people
- we are stewards
- we are partners
- we are responsive.

Sources: WVA (2012) and WVI (2010b, 2012)

my own availability we eventually conducted the meeting with them over Skype using CLC facilities in October 2011. In November 2011 I made a final visit to Alice Springs to conduct further interviews with the program managers at WVA and CLC to bring the case study up to date.

### World Vision's approach to development

WVA is part of the worldwide community development organisation, World Vision International (WVI), that provides short term and long term assistance to 100 million people in more than 90 countries.<sup>1</sup> WVA was established in 1966 and is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation (see Fig. 1). It is 'dedicated to working with children, families and communities, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender, to overcome poverty and injustice' (WVI 2012). WVA emphasises that its policies do not allow proselytism through their programs. Rather, their Christian values drive their commitment to their work (see Fig. 1).

World Vision (WV) promotes what it calls 'transformational development', which it describes as a holistic approach to improving the lives of the poor by recognising people's physical, social, spiritual, economic and political needs. WVA international programs department understands development to be essentially a political task, not simply

responding to needs, but attending to the underlying causes of poverty—the powerful political and social dynamics which keep some people poor. In particular they consider themselves to be highly child-focused, and use an ‘integrated programming model’ to work towards the global objective of ‘the sustained wellbeing of children within families and communities—especially the most vulnerable’ (WVI 2010a: 4).

This ‘integrated programming model’ has four elements which are summarised as (1) equipping ‘local-level staff to (2) work effectively with partners (3) toward the sustained well-being of children within families and communities’. This is achieved through (4), basic programme parameters and project models which are well tested and adaptable to different contexts (WVI 2010a: 4-6). The WVI Child Well-Being Outcomes were adopted in April 2009 as a practical definition of what WV is working towards. These include that girls and boys: enjoy good health; are educated for life; experience the love of God and their neighbours; are cared for, protected and participating. Each of these rests on a foundation of the rights of children and is elaborated in up to four more detailed statements (WVI 2009).

World Vision takes the view that the causes of poverty are not confined to a single sector such as agriculture or education. They take an approach which recognises that ‘the root causes of poverty are multi-sectorally diverse and mutually exacerbating’ (WVI n.d.: 1); for this reason they do not undertake single sector technical interventions. Instead they take a more holistic approach called Area Development Programming (Moran 2010). It starts with a baseline assessment process which can take up to two years. This process involves researching the available data about the community, engaging with them, sometimes through some small activities, and building a trustful relationship. It entails explaining who World Vision is, exploring the issues the community wants to address, finding out about other players active in the community relating to children’s development, then developing a program design to tackle the key issues identified. Then follow three cycles of program activity: in the first five years the emphasis is on building capacity; in the second five years, the program is at maximum budget and activity; and in the final period (2–3 years) WV is transitioning out of the community ‘walking alongside’ them as they exit. These programs are known as ‘Area Development Programs’ and they typically involve multiple interventions across sectors in a community which together address the wellbeing of children.

Increasingly, WV is moving away from direct engagement in activities towards more facilitation and working with partners; these may be government agencies or civil society groups working in a formal or informal way in the

community. As the WVA Director of International Programs said (in a personal interview), ‘the key thing is alignment with the overall goal—whether we have shared objectives—this is the key’. Once that alignment is established, prospective partners can be assessed in more detail and due diligence undertaken before the program gets underway. The first five years involve WV working with the community to build their capacity through shared activities, supplemented sometimes by some formal training. Often it is just a matter of building people’s confidence and exposing them to new ways of doing things. The critical aspect is empowering the community to set their own development agenda and pursue it.

In 2009, WVA began to review evaluations conducted each year on programs and projects it supports. In the first year, 46 completed evaluations were reviewed and the report highlighted a number of findings of relevance to this partnership. It emphasised the critical importance of community ownership and engagement to sustainability of projects and the value of leveraging community capacity through partnerships. It noted that establishing partnerships which create an interdependent not a dependent relationship is challenging, and that for sustainability it is important that partnerships are developed between local organisations rather than placing WV at the centre of a local network. It stressed that short term funding is not conducive to sustainability, though strategies to incorporate short term funding into longer term plans may mitigate this effect. It also noted that as a large organisation WV’s ‘cumbersome’ organisational processes and structures can place demands on staff which prevent them from focusing sufficiently on external relationships and partners (WVA 2009b).

### **World Vision’s international work with Indigenous people**

As an international organisation, WV works in a number of countries where poverty and inequality is strongly correlated with First Nation status. Thus, WV is working with indigenous peoples in Latin American countries such as Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile and Bolivia within its Area Development Programmes (see Hallwright 2010). It also works with indigenous people in Asian countries, such as the Philippines and Taiwan, and other settler states such as Canada, where World Vision Canada’s ‘Partners to End Child Poverty’ program includes Aboriginal families among its priorities (WV Canada n.d.). There is an emerging understanding in WVI about this issue of indigenous disadvantage and an international Working Group across the partnership has been proposed to explore this further.

One example of WV's international work with indigenous communities is the Lamay Area Development Program in Peru, which is supported by WVA. It commenced in the mid 1990s, in an area with a largely indigenous community, and has made tangible progress towards its goals of improved child wellbeing. In particular, WV highlights the revival of indigenous law which has been central to the success of this program. As the National Director of World Vision Peru explains,

In marginalised, indigenous communities, it takes years to develop the trust needed to engender strong community organisation. By building on traditional community customs and relationships, Lamay ADP has managed to do just this (WVA 2007: 4).

### **World Vision Australia's approach in Indigenous Australia**

WVA began working with Indigenous Australians in the mid 1970s, and first worked in Central Australia, in Papunya, from 1996–2004 (Skelton 2010) when its Memorandum of Understanding with the local council expired. Its approach differs from the standard Area Development Programs of its international partners. The current WVA Indigenous program is part of a wider Australian program, which also focuses on non-Indigenous children and youth at risk (WVA 2009a). The Indigenous Program includes early childhood care and development work in Central Australia and the east Pilbara, a community governance of mining benefits project in the Pilbara, a home ownership advocacy project in Mapoon, Queensland, a community governance and leadership project in the west Kimberley, and an urban youth public speaking project. Several other projects currently in the assessment and design phase include nutritional food supply and youth development initiatives in the Western Desert. WVA note that Australian Indigenous affairs is an institutionally 'crowded space' so they work strategically to identify an effective niche, where their presence might make a difference; thus the diverse programs reflect the fact that these are where they have identified key opportunities to engage and to contribute to 'structural reform'. Hence, WVA endeavours to undertake advocacy work which arises from its experience in project implementation.

WVA argues that what it hopes to bring to Indigenous communities is the notion of human development as articulated by the work of Amartya Sen (1999), incorporating the choice to take one's own development pathway, but the need for 'functionings' to enjoy rights to which one is entitled. WVA emphasises that sometimes structural and institutional impediments prevent people from being able to advance their human development. Importantly they emphasise that international experience

shows that 'unless you are able to reach a shared understanding with people of what wellbeing means, and the development pathways that can be taken to get there, you have no hope of achieving anything' (Costello 2010: 3). They clearly differentiate between service delivery and development, and highlight the need for active participation, a strengths-based approach, long time frames, and the need to partner with other organisations for sustainability. The WVA program manager in 2010 argued that the Area Development Program model used internationally, which involves WV working across several sectors (such as agriculture, water and sanitation, education, health) simultaneously to generate development impact, has to be viewed differently in the crowded institutional space of Indigenous Australia in which 'many Indigenous people have become quite remarkably disenfranchised from their own development' (Moran 2010: 2). He argued that 'integration' in this context should be judged by the partnerships WVA develops and the way it works from an early childhood entry point to link up issues such as 'nutrition, food security, environmental health, education, training and employment' so that they have an integrated effect on young children, and so that 'participation, empowerment and capability' of community members are enhanced (Moran 2010: 2–3).

### **The Central Land Council—its statutory role and the CD framework**

The CLC is a Commonwealth statutory authority which operates under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the *Native Title Act 1993*. It represents some 24,000 people in the southern part of the Northern Territory. The Council comprises 90 Aboriginal people elected from its vast region which covers 15 language groups. Its initial role was to assist traditional owners to reclaim ownership of their land under the Land Rights Act, and more recently, to assist traditional owners claim their native title rights and interests in land. However, its role has now broadened considerably as it seeks to do more to make Aboriginal communities stronger and healthier places. A Community Development Unit was created in 2005 to lead the design of a community development framework and the implementation of community development projects by the CLC (2009a).

The focus of the Community Development Unit is on working with traditional owners and native title holders using community development principles and processes to create lasting community benefits with monies from land use agreements. The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) Project is one of two large regional projects that the Community Development Unit has been running since its inception and one of five programs currently underway (Campbell and Hunt 2010). In these projects, CLC staff

facilitate comprehensive planning processes that support local people to articulate their development aspirations, identify their priority issues, and draw on local and external knowledge to develop appropriate solutions, which are then implemented largely with their own money. Central to CLC's approach is the well documented lesson from international community development experience that community participation, capacity building and good governance are critical to successful and sustainable development (Campbell & Hunt 2010).

### **CLC, Kurra, and WETT: The roles and relationships**

The WETT Project derives from a mining agreement signed by the traditional owners and Newmont Asia Pacific in 2003 which involved Newmont making annual payments into an education trust (WETT) for Warlpiri for the life of the mine (about 15–20 years from this agreement). Kurra Aboriginal Corporation, the royalty association which is the Trustee for the WETT funds, appointed the CLC to be its agent in relation to the administration of the WETT projects, including the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) project.

The governance arrangements are complex. Kurra Aboriginal Corporation ('Kurra') makes decisions to release funds for the WETT program, while WpkJ is the peak indigenous education organisation in the region. A WpkJ WETT Sub-Committee of Warlpiri women has a major role supporting the CLC's WETT Project Officers to undertake community consultations and develop projects; they also actively participate in strategic planning for the WETT program. A WETT Advisory Committee comprising representatives from CLC, WpkJ, Newmont mining, and three independent advisors with expertise in education and Indigenous governance further develops projects and makes recommendations for funding allocations to Kurra WETT Committee of traditional owners. In practice, Warlpiri women from WpkJ meet together with the Kurra WETT Committee of traditional owners to provide the context and information needed to support Kurra as the primary decision-makers in relation to the project. The intention is to provide training and education opportunities consistent with Warlpiri aspirations which supplement but do not subsidise core government education and training programs. The project is about providing learning opportunities for all Warlpiri from early childhood to adults, and involves a number of activities or sub-projects such as: Language and Culture support in community schools; the ECCD program; Youth and Media Program; Secondary Student Support Program; and the Learning Community Centre Program for post-school aged community members (CLC 2009b, 2010).

These sub-projects were identified through a series of community consultations conducted by the CLC during December 2006. Before describing the early childhood project, it is important to first provide some brief contextual information about the Warlpiri communities in which the project has been developed.

### **The context of the WETT early childhood care and development project**

The WETT ECCD project is operating in four Central Australian communities: Lajamanu, Yuendumu, Willowra and Nyirrpi.

While these communities have mobile populations, at the time of the 2006 Census their populations and median ages were:

- Lajamanu: 669; median age 22 years
- Nyirrpi: 251; median age 25 years
- Yuendumu: 686; median age 26 years
- Willowra: 272; median age 21 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2007).

The people of this region, who are predominantly Warlpiri-speaking Aboriginal people, are considered highly disadvantaged on a range of socioeconomic indicators, suffering from overcrowded housing, low levels of education and employment, low incomes, poor health, and dealing with a range of other issues such as family violence and substance misuse. These are also very youthful populations, with around 10 per cent of residents in the 0–4 age range (rising to 13% in Lajamanu) (ABS 2007). However, they are in many respects culturally strong, and have supported a number of widely acclaimed successful initiatives, such as the Mt Theo program for youth diversion from petrol sniffing or other anti-social behaviour, and youth media activity (Stojanovski 2010).

The four Warlpiri communities were all previously governed by local community government councils, (although Willowra lost its community council and was governed by the Yuendumu Council from 2000) but were incorporated into the Central Desert Shire (CDS) in 2008 as a result of local government reform in the Northern Territory. The time at which the WVA program was beginning also coincided with the implementation of the Commonwealth Government's 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER); all four communities were designated as 'prescribed communities' under the NTER legislation, and were subject to a broad range of measures. The response controversially suspended the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and included compulsory income management, government acquisition of five-year leases over townships, a licensing scheme for community stores, alcohol restrictions, changes to Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), and a range of other restrictions (see Altman &

Hinkson 2007; Brough 2007). Central Australian Indigenous community responses to this NTER were mixed (CLC 2008), but there was widespread disaffection with the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and the way the whole package of measures had been imposed on communities (Commonwealth of Australia 2008; Nicholson et al. 2009). Thus, the context in which the WETT ECCD Project was developing was fluid and highly politicised as the ramifications of these many changes were being felt at local level.

A further contextual factor was the Northern Territory Growth Towns policy of 2009 (Northern Territory Government (NTG) 2009): Yuendumu and Lajamanu were designated growth towns and hence had greater prospects of access to government funds for particular initiatives than the smaller communities of Nyirrpri and Willowra which were not so designated.

### The history of the partnership between WVA and CLC

Around 2006–07 the CLC was seeking to develop some linkages with international development NGOs. At the same time, WVA was looking to develop its program in Central Australia, and met with the CLC to explore opportunities. CLC's wish to find an organisation to manage and develop WETT/WpkJ's desire for a program to focus on early childhood matched well with World Vision's interests and expertise. Thus in 2007 WVA and CLC negotiated, and in early January 2008 signed, a Cooperation Agreement (CLC/WVA 2008) relating to the WETT Warlpiri Early Childhood Centre Program (as it was then called). At that stage the program was a broad concept which the CLC had designed in consultation with Warlpiri communities, but details of how it could be implemented were still to be worked out.

The concept had originally emerged in 2005 when the WETT Advisory Committee had authorised the CLC to engage an independent consultant to explore the best ways for WETT to fund long-term education and training programs with Warlpiri communities. This was a desk-top review of some of the best ideas for Indigenous education in remote communities (Schwab 2006). The report highlighted the importance of early childhood health and education as the foundation for future education, and particularly the transition to primary education. The CLC subsequently consulted with Warlpiri communities who confirmed their own priority on improving children's health and education, and their request for WETT to support this.

At this point the aim of the program was 'to improve child health through improved early childhood health and education services in the four Warlpiri communities'. The program was to focus on 'getting kids ready for school and supporting parents to help their kids be healthy and

**FIG. 2. Principles recommended by the assessment process**

Program development principles recommended by the WVA assessment process :

- Centrality of culture
- Kardiya (non-Aboriginal) and Yapa (Aboriginal) working together
- Both-way learning and education
- Family and community responsibility for the development of children
- Whole of community approach (centre-based activities complement community action)
- Complementary child, family and community focused ECCD activities

Themes emerging across all four communities:

- Support and education to new mothers
- Play opportunities for children
- Improved nutrition and availability of nutritious foods
- Inter-generational activities
- Employment opportunities for Yapa

Source: Winterford & Langkamp 2007: v–vi.

maximise their opportunities.' The Cooperation Agreement made clear that the program would need to be developed specifically to meet local needs in each community, and could 'combine traditional and 'western' ways'; it might include such things as child care centres, parenting education, health checks for kids, and early childhood literacy, though it was not limited to these ideas (CLC/WVA 2008: Schedule 1).

As the Cooperation Agreement was being developed in late 2007, two WVA staff from Melbourne facilitated by a CLC Project Officer undertook an assessment process to hold discussions with community members in each of the four communities about the early childhood development program. The aim was to identify key issues and stakeholders in the region, and to gather whatever data and reports might be available to assist the program design process. Importantly, this process adopted a

strengths-based approach at the outset. It recognised and documented contemporary early childhood development practices, opportunities which could be developed to strengthen early childhood practice, issues which could potentially affect future programs in this area, and drew out some principles which it recommended should inform program development (see Fig. 2). It also identified specific findings and desires in each community (Winterford & Langkamp 2007). This report provided the basis for the development of the initial Design Document for the program (WVA 2008).

The first WVA staff member appointed to the project in April 2008 informed the four communities that the project was proceeding, set up a WVA office in Alice Springs, and developed activities to both show communities that something was happening and to identify further how each of the communities wanted the project to develop. This staff member was an experienced early childhood educator from Central Australia, who had no international development experience but who knew three of the four communities well. She found the WVA systems and logframe terminology somewhat overwhelming. Although she had input to the program design, she focused more on getting things going on the ground, while WVA Melbourne office staff finalised the 'Design' document. A powerpoint summarising the Design was developed and presented to the WETT women and then the Kurra meeting in August 2008, on a very tight timeframe. Meanwhile at Willowra, the WVA fieldworker had herself painted the Shire office space allocated for the playgroup and this action had generated community interest and support from the outset—in particular, local men erected shadecloth over the outdoor play area for the children, and their families started coming to the playgroup when it opened.

## The ECCD program design and implementation

The overall program design is summarised by a detailed 'Logframe' which sets out high level *outcomes* and lower level *outputs* desired, as well as indicators of their achievement, means by which this could be verified, and the assumptions being made in the design.<sup>2</sup> The four broad outcomes sought for the first stage (2008-2010) were:

- provide an appropriate training and support program for parents and carers in the four communities, to enhance the health, wellbeing and development potential of 0-4 year olds
- increase capacity of the existing early childhood centres to implement quality ECCD programs
- increase community capacity to effectively govern the early childhood programs at community and regional level
- improve reflection and learning amongst the ECCD sector in Indigenous Australia (WVA 2008).

These were slightly modified for the next three-year period (2010–13) to reflect progress already made, needs more clearly identified, continuing changes in the institutional landscape, the results of the first monitoring and evaluation report (see below), and longer term sustainability. Whilst this has meant some important changes in the lower level proposed outputs, only the last of the desired *outcomes* has changed significantly, to:

- increase capacity of parents/carers to access and utilise culturally relevant parenting materials and early learning resources (WVA 2010a).

This reflects the importance placed on such materials and the relatively slow progress made towards obtaining culturally relevant resources in the first two years.

Within this design, as indicated above, activities and arrangements in each location vary according to need, but include operation of playgroups, training of childcare workers, parenting support programs, nutrition programs, and creating supportive linkages with health clinics, schools, and youth programs. WVA uses its own resources to carry out its program management role, while WETT has provided some \$3 million for program activities and some staffing and operational costs, or around two-thirds of the total costs of the program to date. Government funds support some activities, such as for training in Yuendumu. The WETT Early Childhood program in the Warlpiri region varies from community to community. Clearly, the slightly different priorities and strategies in each location reflect the detailed assessment process and the different capacities as well as the needs identified in each community.

In every location, WVA workers try to act not as service providers, but as brokers and networkers, supporters of the local peoples' voice, and advocates to get early childhood services operating in a sustained way in these communities, staffed by trained and qualified local women. They try to engage a range of players (such as the health clinics, or visiting services) to help promote healthy 0-4 year olds, through various programs about nutrition and parenting and better stores policies with healthy food choices to support such initiatives. Whilst this may sound relatively straightforward, it isn't. It takes enormous effort to make progress and to sustain early childhood programs and services for the long term.

In Nyirripi for example, WVA worked with the CDS to establish a creche through the renovation of a building and development of an associated outdoor area. By 2011, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations was funding up to three crèche staff, although only two workers had been identified and employed. After a lot of effort, WVA secured early childhood training for four women through Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE), with a trainer visiting one week per month and the BIITE adult learning centre

providing study support. Sustaining the program hasn't been easy. When a staff member resigned, for example, the CDS seemed unable to recruit a replacement and the crèche was closed for some time. A NTG Remote Area Nutritionist (with whom WVA had connections) has also been running a popular nutrition program at the school focusing on purchasing and cooking healthy foods.

In Yuendumu, which already had a childcare centre, the focus has been on strategic planning with the school and the childcare centre around a new child and family centre being built there, and ensuring that the local community voice is heard in this process. An evening playgroup has been held occasionally at the childcare centre, while a morning playgroup, initially held in the Baptist church hall, later moved to the school. Most significantly, the CDS has agreed to auspice the playgroups which will contribute to sustainability—although delays in recruiting staff have been a problem. Support has also been provided through the Central Institute of Technology (CIT, formerly TAFE) from Perth for training of the childcare workers at the existing centre. However, this training had to be provided at Yuendumu and travel difficulties were making participation difficult for Nyirrpi workers.

In Willowra, the playgroup began operating after WVA painted and fitted out a room at the back of the Shire Service Manager's office. Initially four local women on CDEP ran the program. However, when the CDEP rules changed in mid 2009 and 'top up' could not be provided, one woman left. For a short while some women continued to run the playgroup on a voluntary basis, with training provided by CIT. Despite considerable efforts, WVA was unsuccessful in gaining external funds for their work, so eventually WETT funding was used to employ them. WVA is also liaising with the school, which has a pre-school for four year olds, and is trying to help build stronger relations between the school and the community.

At Lajamanu, the most remote location, the early childhood program initially had casual use of a CDS-run Learning Centre and a storeroom for play equipment. However, this was not an ideal arrangement as the Learning Centre had multiple uses and wasn't always available. Then the playgroup was held in a park on land belonging to and near the shop. This central location attracted considerably more children and WVA obtained a shipping container for the site, which some fathers helped fit out to function with taps, sinks, water and other necessities. The Northern Territory Department of Education (NT DET) paid for the fit-out and an early childhood teacher; at the same time, WVA supported local efforts to get a 30-place childcare centre as part of the proposed new Family Centre. However, during 2011, NT DET moved the playgroup to the Lajamanu primary school site; it has been operating from there

consistently since then.<sup>3</sup> WVA staff from Alice Springs visit monthly and support the local staff. WVA also provides a local community mentor for the early childhood workers, and a NT DET Families as First Teachers (FaFT) worker supports them on site.

WVA has worked closely with a range of NTG and other service providers, and tried to support their work as well as facilitate their programs to support the WETT early childhood goals. For example, reference has already been made to collaboration with the Remote Health Nutritionist who ran the very successful program at Nyirrpi. At Willowra, WVA tapped into the expertise of the Family Action Centre at Newcastle to work with men about their role in children's lives (WVA 2010b). In addition, WVA works closely with NT DET's FaFT Program which provides seven Central Australian communities with a Family Educator and an Indigenous Family Liaison Officer both managed by the school principal. Lajamanu is the current focus of this program within the WVA/WETT project area, but later work is expected to be undertaken in Yuendumu. WVA and FaFT have a mutually supportive relationship, and genuine collaboration exists with the Alice Springs FaFT officer.

One of the most successful aspects of the program to date appears to have been the development of local Indigenous early childhood workers. The approach has been to use a community-based training model to provide local training to the women involved in the childcare program and to support them to travel and experience other early childhood models to learn from and share their experiences. WVA has drawn in the CIT from Perth and BIITE to provide community-based training programs for the early childhood workers. CIT has provided programs in Yuendumu and Willowra, while BIITE has provided training for childcare workers at Lajamanu and Nyirrpi. However, BIITE has subsequently identified that it does not have capacity to continue to provide training in Nyirrpi and an alternative provider is being sought. In 2011 WVA successfully negotiated with NT DET to include Yuendumu in their pilot early childhood workforce development program and the provision of the Yuendumu training was transitioned from CIT to NT DET. These transitions require a great deal of care and trust building. In April 2012, CIT continues to provide training in Willowra. This situation indicates the difficulty of staffing and resourcing community-based training in remote locations. The training provision to date has involved intensive training one week in four or five, with follow up community-based mentor support. While it has had its difficulties (e.g. community-based mentors leaving the relevant community, problems with travel for trainees from Nyirrpi, low literacy levels, variability in attendance), on the whole the training has been valued. Approximately 30 women have participated in the training across all four communities, a significant number of students have

completed Certificates I and II, and some are undertaking Certificate III. As a specific example, currently two trainees from Willowra and Yuendumu have completed Certificate I, and eight have completed Certificate II and are working towards Certificate III. They are gradually putting what they learn into practice in their work.

Importantly, the trainees also appreciated and learned from a five-day study tour to the CIT in Perth. Twenty-three Warlpiri early childhood workers, accompanied by 17 children, undertook one module of their certificates in Perth, involving a study visit to a Noongar children's service 'Coolabaroo' (WVA 2010b). Eighteen workers and parents also attended the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Conference held in Alice Springs in July 2010 and both the WpkJ women and the childcare workers themselves gave presentations about their work. This was a very positive experience which boosted the women's confidence and self-esteem, and exposed them to a wide network and many ideas about early childhood development.

One further success has been advocating to NT DET to utilise a remote workforce development pilot program for 'growth towns' to dedicate 0.5 of a position to early childhood in Yuendumu. This means that Yuendumu will have a community-based training position to support the early childhood workers. The remaining 0.5 of the staff member's time will be dedicated to vocational training work within the school. WVA have also arranged for literacy and numeracy support and an interpreter to work with the trainees, as well as employing a community based mentor to support them with their homework and other written work. The CDS has now accessed funds through the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for a practice mentor for them. This mentor will work alongside them in the workplace to help them put their learning into practice. This type of intensive on-the-ground support is what is needed for the early childhood trainees to translate theory into practice, and WVA has now been able to persuade a variety of other providers to provide it.

A further positive development has been the initiation of an early childhood stream at the annual Warlpiri Triangle meeting.<sup>4</sup> This facilitates the development of a regional network of early childhood workers, and at the first meeting in 2011, staff from each centre worked together for two days on curriculum and teaching activities, as well as sharing their experiences.

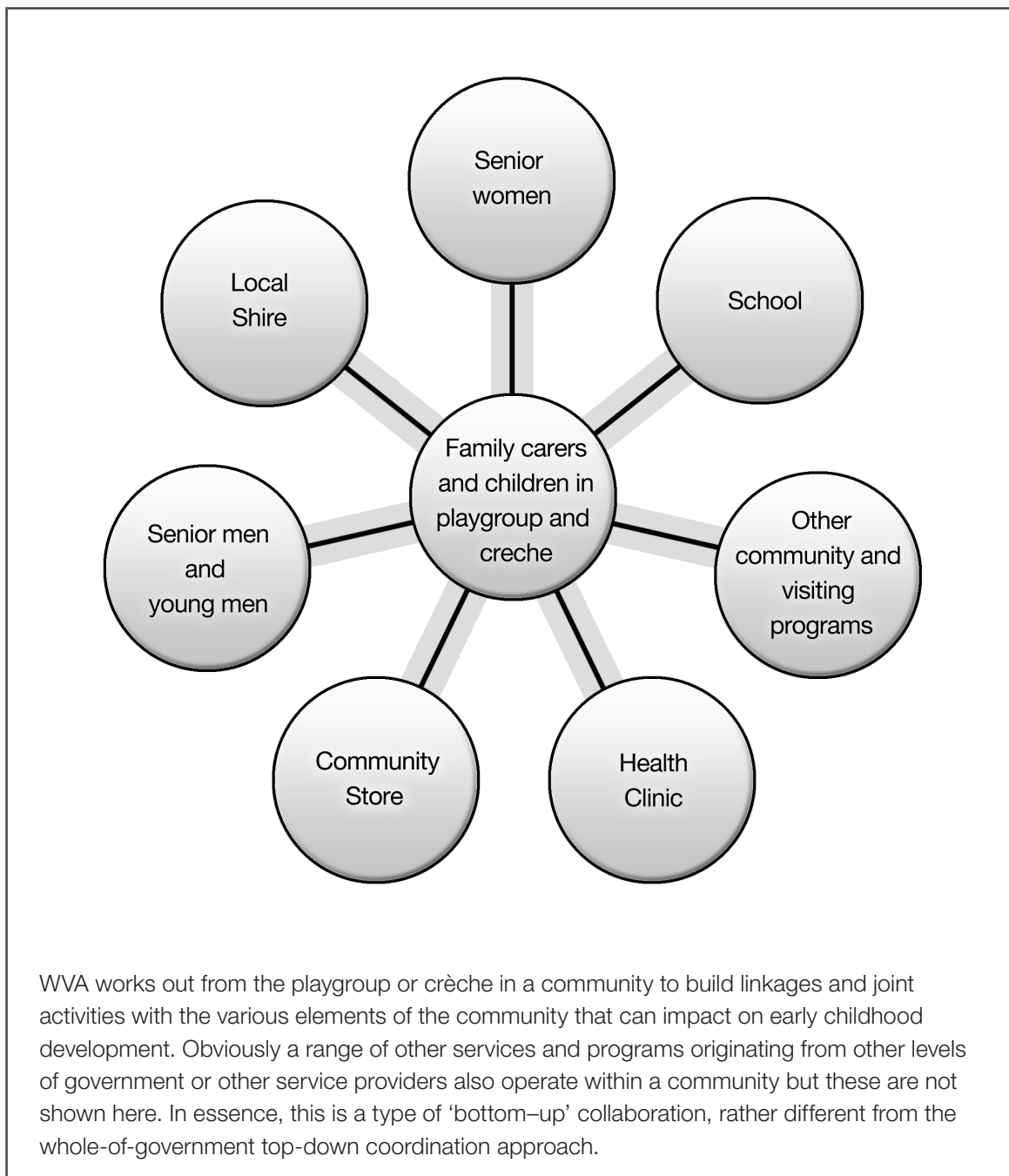
An additional aspect of the project involves trying to establish or strengthen ECCD governance arrangements in each community. For example, at Lajamanu an ECCD committee is supported by a part-time WVA worker in the community, and this group has been active in advocating

for a Family Centre as part of the new Local Implementation Plan for Remote Service Delivery. Other similar groups exist in Yuendumu and Willowra, although the latter group is only just starting up. In Yuendumu the group has played a very important role in the early stages of development of the new Child and Family Centre, with a great deal of input into the design of the building, and their leadership role in decision-making is expected to continue through a positive partnership with NT DET. WVA's experience is that such groups start to work when others take them seriously and they have real input into decision making about early childhood services in their communities. Although Yuendumu has been riven by conflict throughout the project's life, women from different and otherwise conflicting families have agreed to work together because they have been given a real role in relation to the new Child and Family Centre and they recognise that they need to work together for this purpose. In Willowra, a WVA staff member helped the community set up the Early Childhood Reference Group and then assisted them to consult widely within the community to select the right people to recommend to the Shire for the playgroup worker jobs. This was considered to be a very useful process. These governance bodies are providing an important avenue for women, especially younger women, to have a say in early childhood infrastructure and programs. It is developing their confidence and leadership skills.

### **Using a community development approach: What does that look like?**

WVA and CLC staff have similar ideas about what a community development approach implies. They talk about working with the community, rather than for them; getting to know the communities well and building trust with them through a sustained presence; building on community strengths, rather than viewing these communities through the common external prism of deficit and negativity; establishing planning processes which enable people to articulate their aspirations and priorities; providing information and giving people experiences which enable them to know about the options open to them; giving people voice and the opportunity to participate in order to actively change things; treating Indigenous people with respect; and building their confidence in their capacity to do things. In particular they support the capacity development of a group of individuals—the early childhood workers. Above all, WVA emphasises that its approach is not about service delivery. It is about doing what's necessary to make service delivery effective and used by Indigenous people. WVA tries to 'join up' services which are vertically organised by governments, to support the implementation of holistic approaches to early childhood development. It tries to use playgroups or crèches as the nodes from which it builds connections to the whole

**FIG. 3.** Simplified diagram to show how WVA works in communities



community system, which has an impact on early childhood development (Fig. 3). Thus WVA tries to make incremental changes in various aspects of this system, so that in combination these make a difference to children’s wellbeing and development.

Sometimes this policy of not undertaking service delivery but focusing on community development requires some tough calls on the part of staff. For example, one respondent described a visit to Nyirripi. On the first day, the Aboriginal crèche worker and a WVA staff member opened the crèche and it worked well. On the second day, the local crèche worker did not arrive for work; the WV staff member decided not to open the crèche alone as this would have

been simply playing a service delivery role. Similarly at Lajamanu, local people were challenged that their crèche had closed because the non-Indigenous worker had left the community—WVA suggested to them that if they didn’t want to be reliant on non-Indigenous workers that come and go, they needed to work towards running early childhood activities themselves. However, as the 2011 evaluation report on the program commented, this policy creates dilemmas as it can mean that children are denied activities that would benefit them. As the 2011 evaluation recognised, ‘This tension between the empowering of adults and the care and development of children is omnipresent in all communities and the issue is vexed for all of us’ (Saggers et al. 2011: 88).

**TABLE 1. Examples of community indicators**

Children		Evidence
Early literacy and numeracy and play-based learning	Learns colours and shapes	Observation, interviews staff and parents
	Learn to play and work with other children	Observation and interviews
Hygiene, safety and nutrition	Wash hands properly	Observation
Culture	Become strong in culture	Photos, observation and interview
	Learn about good health, nutrition and life skills	Observation, interviews, documentary
Parents/carers	Feel welcome at playgroup and school	Interviews and observation; attendance lists
	Look after all kids, not just their own	Observation and interview
Workers and ECCD Centre	Yapa and Kardiya working together <sup>a</sup>	Observation and interviews
	Train more young people in early childhood	Training records

Note: a. Central Australian terms: 'Yapa' means Aboriginal, while 'Kardiya' means non-Indigenous person.  
Source: Saggars et al. 2009.

In Central Australia there seem to be some particular challenges involved in undertaking such a community development approach. Many decades of disenfranchisement from decision-making appear to have sapped many Indigenous peoples' desire or confidence in their ability to engage with western institutions which have demoralised and devalued them as people, along with their culture. Some would argue that welfare dependence has also contributed to this situation. Change requires challenging relatively well entrenched behaviours and attitudes across the system. On the one hand, it involves building up the skills, capacities and confidence of Indigenous people and giving them opportunities to run programs or have a significant say in the design of future services. It involves supporting them to take responsibility for those programs they can run themselves. On the other hand, it involves changing attitudes and actions within the surrounding western system to support and enable them to have a greater say about or take greater control of the institutions which impact on their daily lives. In Central Australia, this is not easy, as the western governance systems in Indigenous communities can be strongly 'siloes' in sectoral institutions (e.g. health, education), barely functional, or very susceptible to the attitudes and approaches of particular, often locally powerful, individuals in key roles. Many services visit communities fleetingly and may not have the relationships and connections to provide their services in a way that has maximum impact or empowers local people.

Despite these challenges, as one respondent said, this early childhood project was initiated by the Warlpiri community, so it could not have begun in a better place from a community development perspective.

### The monitoring and evaluation aspects of the program

WVA was keen that the WETT ECCD program should be properly evaluated. In 2008, the task was contracted to a consortium led by the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University, with a four-member team including individuals from Charles Darwin University and the University of South Australia. The 'milestones' for the evaluation included:

- a list of measurable community-based indicators of success agreed with community participants for each of the four communities
- an initial report providing a baseline analysis of the status of early childhood care and development in each of the four communities
- a mid-term report on progress to date measured against baseline information
- a final report in relation to both the baseline information and the community indicators of success (Saggars et al. 2009: 1).

This evaluation method reinforced the community development approach of the project by drawing from the community the key outcomes they would be looking for from the project—so that the evaluation could focus on those things. The development of the community-based indicators drew on the 2007 assessment report, interviews and focus groups during the team's visit to the communities in August 2009, and a workshop held as part of a WpkJ meeting in Yuendumu at that time. At that workshop the key themes identified across all four communities in the 2007 assessment report were explored in some detail, in terms of the outcomes desired for:

- children (21 outcomes, grouped as 'early literacy and numeracy and play based learning'; 'hygiene, safety and nutrition'; and 'culture')
- parents/carers (14 outcomes related to parenting/caring)
- workers and the centres themselves (28 outcomes).

These were compiled into a table, with notes as to the evidence which would be used to assess progress. These are all worded in plain English and relatively easily assessed (see Table 1).

The first evaluation report also indicated that the evaluation team had spoken to staff at the health clinic, the school and the stores in each community to try to gather data for more 'objective' indicators to assess changes in education, health and nutrition in the communities. It was noted that there would be difficulties of attribution to the early childhood project as so many interventions were occurring in the communities at the time, notably through the NTER. Various indicators were identified which could be used, subject to the relevant authorities agreeing to release the data for this purpose. These included school attendance data, qualitative indicators of children's behaviour on entering school (which teachers could observe), trends in relation to failure to thrive and Otitis Media, maternal nutrition and maternal smoking, and whether fresh food increased as a percentage of total food purchases in the stores.

The second part of the report described the nature of the ECCD programs in each of the four communities. Each community had by that stage developed a Community Action Plan against which the evaluation team assessed progress, commenting in relation to five key areas of the WVA Design document:

- life skills development and parenting support
- resource development
- capacity building
- governance
- promoting best practice.

Clearly, each community started from a different base and the priority for WVA had been to establish some ECCD activities; with the exception of Nyirрпи, there was

some activity in each community, relationships had been developed with WETT women and other community members, and some training was underway, especially in Yuendumu and Willowra. As the team noted, 'expectations for the programs differ from community to community, but throughout there is a common thread around: consistent activities for children that enhance their school readiness and improve their health and wellbeing; information for parents/carers on parenting, health and nutrition, behaviour management; and opportunities for local people to be trained and employed as child care workers.' (Saggers et al 2009:11). Some issues raised at this stage related to language policy for the programs; governance arrangements; and the extent to which playgroups were operating as de facto child care centres and the level of parental participation expected. Instead of a two-way language policy, a Warlpiri language learning environment, was recommended in order to ensure children develop 'threshold competency' in their mother tongue, an essential requirement for learning other languages such as English (Scrimgeour 2009). The report concluded that, given the many challenges of the context, the 'programs have established a promising foundation' (Saggers et al. 2009: 12).

In August the following year, the Curtin team visited the communities again, and presented their second report in October 2010. This report indicated that there was progress towards most of the community indicators, but access to the more objective data had not yet been granted by the relevant authorities, other than data about school attendance which is publicly available. It is difficult to interpret given so many factors which might impact school attendance; in each community the enrolment and attendance rates were low and did not seem to be improving. However, the team observed greater efforts by the stores to promote healthy foods, commending the Lajamanu store for its achievements, although they noted that prices varied across communities (Saggers et al. 2010).

Then, using the WVA logframe structure, the report assessed in detail the status of ECCD programs in each community. They identified a number of aspects which were working well, and areas which required attention. Among the things that were working well were:

- increased profile and activities of ECCD initiatives in each community, noting that all communities had sustained some ECCD activities during the year
- positive impact of ECCD training, despite challenges for both teachers and students
- nutrition education and promotion, especially through incorporating the Remote Public Health Nutritionist
- community development, not service delivery: the community development approach seemed to be working although there was some debate about that

- complementary staffing within a both ways (two-way) framework: older and younger workers bring different things to the program and it is working in an implicit two-way framework
- support for Warlpiri language and culture: has been incorporated into activities, although the development of Warlpiri language resources is slow.

Some of the issues which the team believed required attention in the future were:

- better networking with other services, particularly a network of early childhood workers in the region
- English language and literacy of those childcare students struggling with studies probably due to literacy issues
- workplace supervision of the students to ensure they practiced what they were learning in their training, especially in relation to health and hygiene basics
- active role for the community ECCD governance structures developing in the communities
- discussion about both-ways childcare and whether there are shared expectations among Kardiya and Yapa about the desired arrangements in the future, especially about the extent to which Yapa wish to take responsibility for these activities in the future.

As the team concluded (Saggers et al. 2010: 30):

... WVA in collaboration with WETT and the CLC have established ambitious goals and indicators for this program. While some of the indicators are within sight, many others will require a sustained effort over years. We believe an extension to the program is realistic and will allow a more realistic timeframe for communities to embed ECCD activities.

In May–June 2011 the team made their third visit to the communities and presented their final evaluation report in August. This report began (Saggers et al. 2011: 5):

Significant progress has been made towards WETT ECCD program's indicators, set by community members and WVA but the goal of improving the health and wellbeing of children 0–5 will take many years of persistent evidence based development.

It commented on the progress made by WVA in developing partnerships with organisations that could sustain the early childhood activities into the future, and the 'positive impact' of the training noting 'the persistence of the trainers and the willingness of the women to continue their training' despite many personal and social obstacles and literacy issues.

One of the unresolved issues in the evaluation process has been where does the early work on community indicators fit within the project's logframe. The original

logframe design did not relate exactly to the indicators the community wanted. Whilst the project's design dealt with the issues the community wanted addressed, the actual indicators from the community (see Table 1) did not get incorporated into the logframe in the form the community used. This has caused some difficulties as the program progressed. However, WVA argues that the community indicators were in fact embedded in the logframe but were written differently. For transparency to the community the evaluation team chose to report on them separately. However, some of the indicators which were included were impossible to measure (e.g. the percentage of families practising good health habits in the home). These issues have raised questions about the effectiveness of the logframe, particularly its complexity and the difficulty of really assessing some of its indicators. The indicators have now been reviewed and made more measurable, but WVA believes that the logframe is nevertheless a useful planning and implementation tool.

### The partnership: How does it operate?

As mentioned above, the partnership between WVA and CLC is somewhat different from the arrangements between the two Australian NGOs and their partners studied earlier (Hunt 2010). In those cases, the NGO provided grants to their Indigenous partners who had to report to and account to them for the program and its expenditure. In this partnership, from the perspective of the CLC, the arrangements are that the CLC has contracted WVA to manage one of its projects; thus WVA is accountable to CLC, and through them to the Royalty Association which provides the program funds (i.e. Kurra, and its WETT WpkJ and WETT Advisory committees). Thus the reporting and accountability in this model is from the international NGO to the Indigenous organisation. However, in practice, WVA also brings its own funds and raises funds from other sources to support the program, so the partnership has a complex funding base. Furthermore, WVA does not accept the idea that they are simply contracted to CLC, since they bring funds to the partnership as well, and prefer to see it as a partnership of equals, with WVA accountabilities also to WETT broadly and to the people in the communities and their own supporter base.

World Vision (Kaugura n.d.) defines partnership as:

An active relationship between organisations or groups that has reached a mature, defined stage of co-operation outlined and governed by an informal or formal agreement. Such an agreement aims to combine resources and expertise of all partners to carry out a specific set of activities around a common purpose and for mutual benefit.

This is somewhat different to the relationships which CLC tends to have with other organisations whom it contracts to undertake specific projects designed and developed within its community development program. Such arrangements tend to be straightforward contracts in which CLC spells out the tasks to be completed and the organisation undertakes to complete them.

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**“We’ve achieved a lot of things with World Vision supporting us, moving ahead and it’s working really well”**

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Despite this difference from their usual approach, on the whole this is a strong and effective partnership between the two main organisations. It has had to negotiate some difficulties at times, and of course there are many types and levels of relationships within the project itself. These include the relationships WVA has with the WpkJ women; the engagement by WVA of other organisations to provide early childhood training; and the ways in which WVA works with 17 other organisations and service providers across the four Warlpiri communities— health clinics, store managers, shire service managers, school staff, and many others.

What works well in the key partnership is that staff of both organisations have respect for each other and the difficult work they are undertaking. They have good communication and honest discussions about the project, and some of its challenges. They share similar ideas about community development and how it can be undertaken in Indigenous communities, and are both trying to help the Warlpiri people realise their own aspirations. These are the critical factors which make the partnership successful.

However, there clearly were different expectations about what the ‘partnership’ would mean. At first, when WVA was being introduced to the communities and the program was being designed, CLC were very active partners, engaging with WVA in the communities. As time went on, CLC withdrew from such active participation in the project and left WVA to get on with the implementation. Whilst this was a vote of confidence in WVA’s work on the part of CLC, WVA felt that the partnership had been reduced to a more contractual reporting type of relationship, which was disappointing to them. They would have liked to have a CLC project officer working alongside them. However, with the limited resources of CLC for the many components of the WETT project this was unrealistic. Some confusion may have also arisen because of the complexity of the contractual and funding agreements between the partners;

in the project extension, these were rolled into a single document, which makes arrangements and expectations clearer. Other concerns arose when WVA wanted to extend the partnership relationship over a much longer period (consistent with its international timeframes) and a broader scope than the CLC Community Development Unit was able to consider. However, despite these issues the partners still have a very collaborative working relationship, and in particular have undertaken some useful joint advocacy—a powerful combination. During 2011 some major restructuring within WVA led to significant staff changes which, combined with some loss of staff in the Alice Springs office, brought the partnership to a new phase. Concerns CLC had about WVA staff burnout and the quality of the first draft of the third evaluation report, triggered some high level meetings of the partners which has resolved most of these tensions, and is resulting in a stronger partnership.

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**“They have been supporting us, but we support each other sharing what we want to talk about. We have been all working together to make childcare a strong place for our children.”**

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### **Factors in the success of the program**

At the time of writing, the project has been operating for three years, with two more years to run, but signs of success are already evident and the factors which are contributing to that success can already be identified. As one of the WETT Committee members said,

...we’ve achieved a lot of things with World Vision supporting us, moving ahead and it’s working really well.

The first factor in the success of the project is the level of Aboriginal control and the strong voice of the Warlpiri women of WpkJ. World Vision and CLC are both committed to Warlpiri people making the key decisions, running things themselves, and developing the capacities to do that. These women want to see this project happen and are really driving it now. They have gained broader Warlpiri community support so that Warlpiri money is committed to it as a priority. The level of resourcing provided by Kurra means that the project has been able to bring in expertise

and tailor training to the needs of the women. That is, they can have training delivered in their communities. The genuine power which the women have, and the power that communities have in relation to the project, leads to engagement. The Warlpiri women of the WETT committee see the relationship as an equal partnership. As one of the women said,

They have been supporting us, but we support each other sharing what we want to talk about. We have been all working together to make childcare a strong place for our children.

The Warlpiri women felt that with the support WVA was providing:

it's going really well, and things are happening, we make things happen.

They particularly emphasised the mutuality of the partnership, with the women providing support to WVA as well as the NGO supporting them.

Second, the project is clearly strengths-based and relationships-based, building on the strengths and assets in the communities, with everyone involved committed to generating positive change and real outcomes for the children. Associated with this is the quality of the relationships which WVA staff have formed with people in the communities, and the diverse range of stakeholders. Most importantly they have shown respect and accorded dignity to Warlpiri people and been open to learning from them; they see themselves as on a shared journey where learning is reciprocal and everyone is prepared to change and grow. Developing such good relationships has happened because of the qualities of the people involved. WVA staff take the time to understand the community relationships and to build trust; they have a positive 'can do' mindset, and are committed to making small, tangible things happen; yet they show some humility. They treat people respectfully, and this is appreciated by those they work with; they also challenge people to extend themselves, but with the appropriate support. WVA seems to have achieved a balance between offering necessary support but not creating dependence, and is appreciated for being out in communities on a regular basis, providing that support. Their flexibility and adaptability is also important in enabling them to respond to changing local circumstances. WVA is able to bring others into its work with Warlpiri communities, providing a structured space for them to work effectively and collaborate with others—especially Warlpiri people, working towards the same goals.

By building on strengths and extending people, the WETT women feel that WVA is working towards them being able to do things for themselves:

World Vision is there to help but later on if they're gone we'll be doing it ourselves because what we learn from them is giving us a good opportunity to run our own childcare.

Third, the model of training is potentially very strong, though it has been difficult to maintain. It incorporates parents, families, and is holistic and embedded in life of the community, using a range of strategies. The community-based model of training of the early childhood care workers has been quite successful, and has been complemented by other training strategies in the community (e.g. with children in the nutrition program, and with men through the Willowra Early Days Program, which is working with the men as well as the women to make some DVDs about Warlpiri child rearing practices and early childhood development).

Fourth, WVA's interstitial role is shifting things. It involves working around and in between organisations and 'sitting behind the scenes' at times, which can mean it is not recognised as doing anything, as it is not delivering a service itself. But this work, and the influence the project brings, means for example that after a playgroup started operating in one community the Shire shifted from not being interested in early childhood to taking on the responsibility for it, so WVA can eventually leave and the playgroup will likely continue. At Yuendumu, the WETT women noted that WVA had helped make the government hold good consultations with the community about the proposed Child and Family Centre:

World Vision helped make the government make good consultations and share ideas.

The partnership with the CLC has been extremely important, for the political clout it brings, and the CLC knowledge of how to consult effectively in communities. Despite some occasional difficulties mentioned above, the partnership has had regular and open communication, and the partners have brought different strengths to the project—especially the CLC knowledge of working in Central Australian communities and WVA early childhood expertise, the knowledge of the Program Manager in particular, and the project design tools it brought to the process. However, the logframe has to some degree caused difficulties for the project due to the complexity and ambitious nature of the design and the issue of its relationship with the community indicators. It is unclear whether the tool itself is unsuitable for programs of this nature or whether it was just too detailed and complex a program design which made evaluation difficult. WVA notes that Indigenous contexts are inherently complex and that while a logframe can be used to make sense of that

complexity, it needs to be frequently updated based on action-learning cycles. They agree that perhaps they were slow to update the logframe as learning emerged during the project, but they believe the real problem is the complexity of the situation, rather than the tool, which causes difficulties. Some development agencies are moving away from logframes to other tools for project management, while others find them useful. In this case, the logframe became the focus of some tensions for the partners, although WVA still attests to its value but acknowledges there may be other tools that are useful for sharing with partner organisations that can assist in articulating the theory of change and the program logic underpinning particular projects.

## Challenges

The project achievements have not come about without considerable challenges. One of the most obvious is the remote context, the very long distances project workers travel on dirt roads, the lack of accommodation, and the vagaries of the unusually wet and very cold windy weather (which meant that at times access has been difficult or impossible, or staff have had to leave communities early to get safely home). Equally, local people may not want to leave their homes to go out for playgroup or other activities in challenging weather. Communication is also very difficult, which means that it may be impossible to set up meetings in advance or be sure the person a worker needs to see will be in the community on arrival.

The CLC has been anxious to ensure that the ECCD programs and the holistic community support around them would last once WETT funding ceases. The stakes are relatively high for a local organisation like the CLC, which is acting as Kurra's agent with accountability to Kurra itself—and is still introducing traditional owners to the concept of using Aboriginal money for community development purposes. WVA's view is that sustainability will be embedded in the practices of the diverse organisations it is working with—not with one single body. Their 'exit' strategy involves reliance on the local service providers taking on the responsibilities to sustain the early childhood services. Thus they are working towards system-level change which is difficult to achieve, but which they are pursuing with a great deal of vigour. They believe that their role as brokers 'between the community and agencies and among the agencies themselves is very fruitful' (Hutchins & Moran 2010: 4). Importantly, WVA recognise that long term governance arrangements for the program's future need to be developed at many levels from the outset, not left until late in the project (Moran 2010).

Persuading other agencies which are located in the communities to take on the responsibilities for early childhood wellbeing is challenging. There are many players

operating in this region, but they don't all operate within a development framework.<sup>5</sup> While WVA has 'been successful in attracting some government funding for the project it has proved more difficult to persuade government agencies of the benefits of taking a bottom-up community-driven approach to development' (Hutchins & Moran 2010: 3). Indeed, the approaches and attitudes of some can either make progress slow or work against what this project is trying to achieve, and it isn't always possible to 'work around' them. They can be locally very influential and make developing this Warlpiri-controlled program difficult. In fact they may be unable to see that their behaviours are contributing to what they see as community dysfunction.

A huge dilemma in WVA's strategy of trying to embed early childhood services in existing local agencies is that there may be a trade-off between sustainability and community control. This became very evident in 2011 when the Lajamanu Playgroup, under the auspices of FaFT, moved to the school. They did this without consulting with the community and Yapa really felt they lost control at that point. In particular, a decision made by the community to leave the shipping container in place in case they wanted to return the playgroup to the park, was ignored. However, the school is a well-resourced location and families loved it, so children's participation actually increased. While the playgroup was attracting more children, and seemed secure for the future, the community had lost control and a number of the Aboriginal childcare workers quit. Interestingly, a difference in approach between the FaFT officer in Alice Springs who understood community development, and the FaFT staff member on the ground who seemed not to, also illustrates that on the ground individuals are very powerful.

The same is true in relation to schools. While WVA can form a productive partnership with the NT DET at a central level, in reality school principals are in control of their schools. This is where partnerships and relationships are actually negotiated. In a sequel to this situation, as a result of the increased number at Lajamanu's playgroup in 2011, the number of children attending pre-school in 2012 grew and the school no longer had room for the playgroup. It has returned to a community setting and as this paper was finalised it is again run entirely by Yapa staff.

There is clearly a diverse array of agencies working in communities. WVA has found it hard to track exactly what external support is provided to communities, and how effectively it is deployed. Further, there is a shortage of highly skilled staff committed to working in Central Australia, and turnover is often very fast; this adds more difficulties to partnering, as relationships have to be frequently renegotiated.

A further problem of successful handover of the ECCD programs to government agencies is that WVA and CLC access to data for evaluation of the program, already very limited, has been reduced. Another issue relates to developing employment models that work for Yapa. Within mainstream services the standard model involves a set number of full and/or part-time workers, but Warlpiri people's mobility can make such a model ineffective at times when staff are away for weeks and cannot be replaced. WVA is encouraging service providers to trial a different model which would involve permanent part-time workers and/or a pool of early childhood workers who can be drawn upon. This may address the mobility issue and also bring more family networks into the staff represented in the early childhood centres, thereby encouraging more families to utilise the centres (knowing their relative is present).

The wider government policies have also created a difficult environment, as there has been a great deal of change in these communities as a result of the NTER and the NTG local government Shire reforms, both of which have considerably reduced the decision-making power of local communities. The shires are still developing their own capacities and CDS was initially slow to partner, while schools appear to have limited capacities beyond their formal mandates. Changes in government policies have been unhelpful to the aspirations of Warlpiri in this project. Funding is difficult to obtain for this early childhood group—for example, Council of Australian Governments (COAG) targets are limited to pre-school provision, not the 0–4 age group. The NTG decision to mandate four hours of English language in schools and effectively downgrade Warlpiri language and culture in the curriculum presented further problems (Simpson, Caffery & McConvell 2009). The changes to CDEP also had a negative impact on the Willowra Playgroup workers who were no longer eligible for CDEP funding.

Despite the many positives in this project design, it is sometimes hard to keep people motivated in this environment. Within the communities, local conflict may be a problem to overcome, there is a perceived level of depression, and family or community violence is evident. Challenging and overcoming this social environment depends on very strong relationships. Gaining and maintaining parental engagement is a continuing challenge, and one strategy to bring in people with expertise, such as the Family Action Centre Team working with the community at Willowra and the nutritionist working in two centres, has had varying levels of success. Essentially, the development of relationships with parents takes a lot of time and personal contact.

Achieving sustainable change in such a difficult context clearly doesn't happen overnight, yet projects often want to see quick results. Sustaining efforts is critical to success, but this appears expensive and budgets tend to

be short term. Gaining and keeping high quality staff over the long term is also a challenge. CLC staff appreciate how hard it is to achieve change in Central Australia, and feel that WVA has set ambitious objectives for itself, perhaps over-ambitious in some respects. One of the CLC's reflections, after five years of work in community development in the Centre, is to aim for modest goals and keep things manageable, given all the constraints of the context. Only time will tell whether this project's goals will be fully achieved.

The relationship of the Central Australian field office of WVA with their Melbourne headquarters has not always been straightforward. International NGOs often struggle with how to treat their Australian Indigenous programs, when they are used to operating with separate field offices overseas in developing countries. It took some time for WVA to appreciate how demanding the conditions were in Central Australia and reflect that in their employment arrangements. In this case, the early childhood sectoral model is not consistent with the way WVA often works internationally in its more holistic Area Development Programs, nor in its duration.<sup>6</sup> Central Australian staff, who know the context well, argue to retain their current model. They note the different situation in an Indigenous community here with so many stakeholders operating in the space and the cost and difficulty of making progress in one area alone. Together with the Head of the Australian Program, they assert that they are in fact working from a single starting point—ECCD—into many sectors such as health, local governance and education (Moran 2010). Therefore the principle of integrated development is maintained. The five year duration of this project is only one-third the length WVA usually commits to overseas when it has the relative certainty of long term child sponsorship to sustain it, which is not the case here. The duration of projects is different where WVA uses grant funding.

## Reflections

This research aimed to explore how international NGOs working with Indigenous communities and community organisations reflected the community development approach they use internationally, and to understand more about the partnerships developed between them. This case illuminates some of these issues. Interestingly, WVA seems generally not to make special provision in its Area Development Programs for indigenous peoples with whom it works overseas, although they are clearly participants in them. However, there are examples where indigenous cultural issues are foregrounded, such as in Peru, where the issue of indigenous law and custom was strongly reinforced and is believed to have contributed to the success of the program there. Within WV there is considerable experience in working with a range of marginalised groups and cultures

and there is an international debate about whether there is unique difference in working with indigenous peoples.

While there are differences between how WVA usually operates internationally through its Area Development Programs, and the way it is working in Central Australia, there are many common principles which it utilises in both contexts. Equally, those fundamental principles are shared with its partner, the CLC, which has contracted the international NGO to undertake this early childhood development work.

The most important principle is indigenous control and decision-making, so that the project reflects indigenous aspirations and builds local indigenous capacity. This project is well-founded on the aspirations of the Warlpiri people, and is driven by a capable group of Warlpiri women who comprise the WETT/WpkJ committee. Their leadership has been extremely important to this project and their own capacity continues to develop. However, these women are responsible for leadership across the whole suite of WETT programs, not just early childhood, so there is a need to develop a new generation of women who can provide leadership in ECCD specifically, so as not to overburden the more senior women leaders. This process is just beginning with the training and development of the childcare workers themselves and the integration of ECCD into the Warlpiri triangle process.

Despite these significant questions which arise from the difficult Central Australian context, there are many factors which appear to be contributing to the early successes of this project and the partnerships WVA has with CLC and Warlpiri people. To summarise, these factors are:

- the shared vision and principles which the partners articulate and, in particular, respect for the expressed goals and aspirations of the Warlpiri people
- the trust and sound relationships established between WVA staff and the Warlpiri communities, and in particular the respectful way WVA staff relate to the local people
- the strong support and direction given to the project by the eight women of the WETT/WpkJ committee
- the high level of Indigenous control and decision-making, and the fact that this project was initiated by and has largely been funded by Warlpiri people, through their royalty association
- the strengths-based and positive 'can do' approach which enables progress to be made
- the efforts to train and employ local Warlpiri early childhood workers in their communities and to ensure that local Warlpiri workers gain recognised qualifications for early childhood work

- the different strengths the CLC and WVA as the key partners bring to the project and the respect each has for the others' expertise and capacities
- the relationships WVA has established with a broad range of stakeholders who can contribute to ECCD across the Warlpiri region and eventually sustain it
- the quality of the project's preparation, and the ability to be flexible in its implementation
- the combined strength of the advocacy by CLC and WVA when required
- the level of resourcing which has enabled, for example, the relatively expensive but effective training model to be implemented.

The main challenges have been:

- the very difficult physical conditions of Central Australia
- the complexity of the context and the CLC's sense that there were difficulties combining Indigenous indicators of success with the logframe indicators, particularly for evaluation purposes
- evaluating the program's success, due to the difficulty of obtaining data and the unmeasurable nature of some of the desired outcomes
- WV not wanting to take on service delivery for reasons of sustainability, but rather taking a more demonstration and advocacy role to encourage other services to deliver programs for the long term (combined with the following point)
- the difficulty of finding suitable partners and facilities to provide early childhood services over the long term in a developmental model
- government policies which run counter to, undermine, or constrain the program's approach and Warlpiri aspirations
- how an NGO can successfully engender shifts in attitudes and structural arrangements to support a Warlpiri-led ECCD program.

The project has drawn on the expertise WVA brings to ECCD and some highly competent and committed community development staff, but the respectful and supportive way they work with local people and local institutions to build their capacities and confidence is critical to this project's success to date. This is clearly not the norm in Central Australia, particularly at this time, when the predominant narrative about Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory has been of dysfunction and the need for coercive measures. This leads to a further, as yet unresolved, question of how far the Warlpiri communities want to manage ECCD programs entirely themselves, or with Kardiya help, or whether they will be happy if the programs are managed by other institutions.

While WVA internationally and in Central Australia is working as a facilitator engaging many local partners, one big question in this context is whether a necessary condition for such successful partnership is met—namely, that the potential partners share the overall goal of ECCD, particularly empowering local staff and communities to set and pursue their development agenda. Whilst the Warlpiri communities and the CLC clearly share this goal, other local stakeholders become partners in this project may not share them, at least with the same level of commitment and understanding. This makes embedding a sustainable future for the ECCD program more difficult.

This raises the question of the extent to which an NGO project can generate structural reform. Capacity development theory emphasises the systemic nature of capacity development (Brinkerhoff & Morgan 2010), and the challenge facing the CLC and WVA, as well as the Warlpiri advocates, is how to shift the rather unsupportive Central Australian ‘system’ of western governance whose multiple-level manifestations may impede, rather than support, Indigenous development if the benefits of this project are to be sustained for the long term.

## Notes

1. World Vision (WV) will be used to denote the partnership as a whole; WVI to refer to the International partnership secretariat, based in the United States.
2. A logframe approach refers to the Logical Framework Analysis widely used by international development organisations to plan activities, based on a detailed analysis of the situation, development of a logical hierarchy of objectives, and activities related to them, identification of risks and assumptions, and a plan for monitoring and evaluation of outputs and outcomes. See <http://www.usaid.gov/ausguide/pdf/ausguideline3.3.pdf> for an example.
3. Although see discussion later about the trade-off between sustainability and Yapa control.
4. The Warlpiri Triangle meeting is an annual meeting of Warlpiri educators from the four Warlpiri communities. It is incorporated as WkpJ.
5. WVA identified 17 relevant players operating within the region with whom they had established working relationships by late 2010.
6. Whilst Area Development Programming is the flagship for WV in many countries it does use sectoral programming in some situations, particularly with grant funding, such as in the Pacific.

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