



ADRA First Nations Community Development Research Snapshot

Prof Tracie Mafile'o (Avondale University), Dr Francis Bobongie-Harris (QUT), Shanelle Fiaalii (QUT) | August 2024



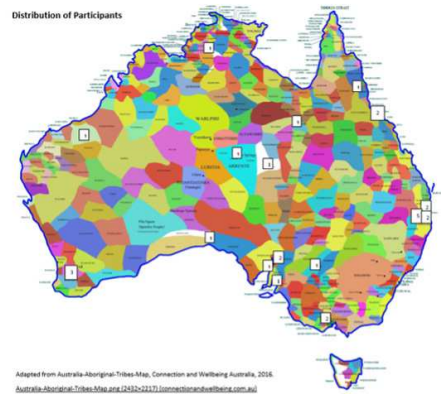
Background

This research investigated effective First Nations community development approaches in Australia. This scoping study was commissioned by ADRA Australia, the lead humanitarian organisation of the Seventh-day Adventist church, to inform their programme development and to strengthen their responsiveness to Australia's First Nation communities.

Research Approach

This qualitative study utilised yarning, an Indigenous research method, and was guided by Indigenous ethical principles. The research engaged 28 key informants and First Nations community members in several sites around Australia and intentionally engaged decolonisation strategies in its planning and implementation. The majority of participants were familiar with ADRA either as beneficiaries of ADRA projects or as volunteers or organisers of ADRA projects. This research provides unique insights, being one of only a few studies which have engaged First Nations Australian Adventists to bring forward their perspectives and experiences to inform future strategic planning.

Figure 1: Distribution of participants and the Country they spoke about



Overview of Key Findings

Effective community development hinges on long-term commitment, understanding local history, and ensuring lasting positive systemic change. Building genuine, mutually beneficial relationships with community leaders through regular engagement is crucial. In addition, community-led initiatives that address deep-seated issues like racism and lack of basic services are essential.

Tailoring programmes to meet unique community needs also ensures meaningful change. Establishing regular feedback mechanisms and transparent reporting keeps the community informed and involved, thereby building trust. Prioritising culturally safe services and collaborating with organisations to fund these services further improves accessibility. Providing health support through health education programs addresses broader health challenges. Finally, supporting communities through targeted programs promotes positive community engagement and creates real change.

Recommendations for Effective First Nations Community Development

Prioritise Community Sustainability: Commit to long-term projects based on a solid understanding of the history of the place and its people. Train local community members and maintain a continuous presence to build trust and ensure sustained positive changes.

Foster Strong Relationships: Build genuine, mutually beneficial relationships with community leaders and stakeholders through regular engagement and presence. These connections are more important than the programmes themselves. Important relationships include those with elders and with local shire First Nations representatives.

“They would have to come down and... just get to know the mob... just having a yarn with them.”

Address Root Causes of Issues: Develop community-led initiatives that address deep-seated issues like racism and lack of basic services. Tailor programmes to meet the unique needs of each community, avoiding generic solutions and move beyond a focus on charity.

Promote Historical and Cultural Awareness: Incorporate an understanding of historical context and the legacy of colonisation into development efforts. Ensure all initiatives are culturally sensitive and respectful of First Nations traditions and values.

Ensure Accountability and Transparency: Establish regular feedback mechanisms and transparent reporting to keep the community informed and involved. Accountability

and transparency can be assisted by ensuring First Nations voices in governance roles and establishment and meaningful engagement with a First Nations advisory or reference group.

“The importance of being able to collaborate with other services both internally (within the church) but also external, other stakeholders in the community, is one of those keys to success.”

Understanding and Addressing Accessibility: Prioritise culturally safe services for First Nations people. Collaborate with other organisations to fund these services within communities and offer transport options, like a community bus, to improve accessibility and affordability.

Enhancing Education and Employment Opportunities: Collaborate with other organisations to offer scholarships for First Nations students and create pathways between education and employment. For example, work with Mamarapha College to develop relevant course offerings (such as community development, youth work) which will contribute to ‘close the gap’. Explore internship and employment pathways leveraging the extensive education and health network of organisations.

“There is so much room for ADRA to be pouring out their resources in the right areas and having non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people supporting each other for the bigger picture. And that’s just helping our communities grow and heal.”

Improving Health and Wellbeing: Provide health support promoting positive community engagement. For example: fund pumps for community gardens and offer health education programs. Integrate these with other initiatives, such as constructing a community health centre.

Supporting Youth and Men: Develop targeted programmes to support youth and men, addressing issues like drug abuse, domestic violence, and homelessness. Provide mental health support, safe spaces for dialogue, and initiatives promoting positive role models and community engagement.

Establish and Sustain Community Programs: Implement early intervention programs focusing on education, life skills, and positive activities. Develop and maintain ongoing culturally sensitive community programmes for youth. Focus on preventing recidivism by providing consistent support and engagement.

For more information, contact:

tracie.mafileo@avondale.edu
francis.bobongie@qut.edu.au
s.fiaalii@qut.edu.au