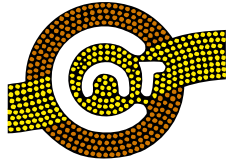


ALI CURUNG

ourplace
radio

Volume 6
Segment 13



**Centre for
Appropriate
Technology**

© Centre for Appropriate Technology 2007
32 Priest Street, Alice Springs NT 0870

The Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) is the national Indigenous science and technology organisation. CAT's vision is Happy and Safe communities of Indigenous peoples and its purpose is to secure sustainable livelihoods through appropriate technology. CAT is currently funded from a variety of sources including the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments and private sources.

Our Place radio transcripts document interviews with people living and working in remote Indigenous communities. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any means without prior permission.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Centre for Appropriate Technology.

CENTRE FOR APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY - OFFICES

Central Australia

Head Office
32 Priest Street
PO Box 8044
Alice Springs NT 0870

T (08) 8951 4311
F (08) 8951 4333
info@icat.org.au

North Queensland

7/330 Sheridan Street
PO Box 6182
Cairns QLD 4870

T (07) 4031 0505
F (07) 4031 0431
cairns@icat.org.au

Northern Australia

GPO Box 2875
Darwin NT 0801

T (08) 8981 7599
F (08) 8981 7233
darwin@icat.org.au

Kimberley

3/68 Clarendon Street
PO Box 1304
Derby WA 6728

T (08) 9191 2585
F (08) 9191 2598
derby@icat.org.au

1 Bauhinia Street
PO Box 604
Kununurra WA 6743

T/F (08) 9169 3970
kununurra@icat.org.au

Adrian

We bring you a special edition about the Shared Responsibilities Agreements in remote communities and the Federal Governments Emergency Response in the Northern Territory. We're taking an in-depth look at how the remote community of Ali Curung are working on their Shared Responsibilities Agreement and how people are being informed of the Federal Governments Emergency Response.

A few weeks ago I travelled to Ali Curung and caught up with people in the community about these issues, we'll hear more about the Federal Governments Emergency Response later in the program.

One of the main ways the Federal government has created a new approach in Indigenous affairs is by introducing the new policy of Shared Responsibility Agreements. The Shared Responsibility Agreements are not compulsory agreements but they're voluntary between governments and Indigenous communities so it's up to each community if they want to sign up to a Shared Responsibility Agreement, with the benefits that governments provide in each agreement in return communities have to make specific commitments so they can achieve the goals that they've identified, the agreements are developed so that each community can decide for itself what issues they want to deal with. The Ali Curung community signed their Shared Responsibility Agreements with the Federal Government over a year ago. The 3 main projects under their Shared Responsibility Agreements are the market garden, the arts centre and the bus services. Dick Martin is the project manager of the Shared Responsibility Agreement at Ali Curung.

Dick Martin: "Well, for the bus service for example the community is to run it as a business, its user pays so they have to provide not only people to drive the bus with the right licence qualifications they've also got to be able to pay a standard fare to go from here to Tennant Creek or to Alice Springs. The main reason for the Bus service was actually to allow people a ready access to the medical facilities in Tennant Creek, services likely to be expanded for other reasons".

"Ali Curung has been without an art centre for a long time and it's to be developed also as a business, it'll be governed I suppose you'd say by a committee and the committee will determine which artists are to be a part of the art centre and they'll determine fundamentally how the Art centre is run".

"Ah, with the market garden the community is to supply people to work in the market garden and that ranges from jobs as simple as weeding through to laying irrigation pipe, maintaining the irrigation, monitoring the irrigation as well as, the planting and harvesting of crops. In hand and hand with this they also undergo training, the funds provided for training are provided by DEET. Most of the men who've worked in the market garden have achieved Certificate 1 in Horticulture".

Adrian

Growing several vegetables and some fruit, the market garden was established just over one year ago after they'd signed their Shared Responsibility Agreements with the Federal government. When the agreement was signed by the elders, Adrian Munghton was then employed by the Ali Curung Community Council to work with the locals in the community after they had done their training in Certificate 1 in Horticulture.

Adrian M.: "They got me involved in the vegie garden just recruiting the locals and that, CDEP programs, they gave me the job to oversee it all so we started off with 10 blokes startin' it off, just irrigation line, plantin' seeds. At the moment we've got about 3 full time gardeners or farmers here. They like the garden work out door as well, you know they live out bush as well so they like the outdoor life especially the life style and that, yeah they doin' alright they're pretty good lads. At the moment and that we got tomatoes, broccoli, carrots, cabbages, cauliflower, we're gonna start growing pumpkins and that probably in the next couple of days or so. We just gonna re-plant watermelons again as well for our December crops so yeah. We've got plenty of water here, that keeps them alive as well you know, there's a lot of weeding to be done as well to keep the weeding down there's so much water plus the ground's real rich in nutrients and stuff like that as well. That's the main thing really just to keep them motivated and that, if you haven't got the motivation there well they won't do the job or that but yeah just encourage them you know, take pride in what they doin' and that and they really appreciate it as well. Communications the main thing I think, joke from time to time, don't take it too serious and that but do the work at the same time and that".

Adrian

Four years ago I caught up with the Chief Executive Officer of Ali Curung, Kevin Diffler, about their business plan for the vegetable garden. At that time, the business plan was to get vegetables and fruit to the Tennant Creek markets. As project manager Vick Martin consulted the Community Council about working with a commercial distributor in Alice Springs.

Vick Martin: “Unfortunately the Tennant Creek market is not enough, it’s too small, the amounts of money it costs to run a market garden is far and above what we could expect to return out of Tennant Creek so we’re developing a relationship with a commercial distributor in Alice Springs and what we’ve decided to do at this stage is, we’re going down a completely commercial path in that we’ll put in crops as advised by him that will give us some maximum cash return over a twelve month period and that cash will be enough to pay for a full-time farm manager and that farm manager will do what work is necessary when it’s necessary and employ people from the community who want to work in it, that seems to us the only way we have to go now. To sustain that we have to be able to produce enough product from that garden to cover those costs of employment”.

Adrian

When the Shared Responsibility Agreement was signed by the Community Council, some people in the community had their concerns about the current projects being sustainable.

Vick Martin: “It’s been put into place the Agreement was signed by the Council, that Agreement said the community do agree to the terms of the SRA and while some people would like it and some people don’t like it overall the community said this is what we want and therefore the community has to go along with it. I think that overall when you talk to most of the leaders in the community they’re 100% in agreement with it”.

Adrian

I asked Vic Martin about why the Community Council made the decision to sign up to the Shared Responsibility Agreement with the Federal Government.

Vic Martin: “A lot of them have a deep concern about the future of Ali Curung for the many and complex reasons and they feel to some extent that these facilities make Ali Curung a more attractive place and a easier place to live in, so it’s more likely to maintain the family units, they won’t drift away to Tennant Creek or Alice Springs”.

Adrian

Just a moment ago we touched on how some people in the community had their concerns about whether or not the projects would be sustainable. The Indigenous Coordination Centres or ICC are a part of the Federal Government strategy to help establish the projects under the Shared Responsibility Agreements. The concerns that various people had in the community about the projects being successful has surfaced as Vic Martin explains the projects under the Shared Responsibility Agreement are currently having some problems receiving the ongoing funding from the Indigenous Coordination Centre.

Vic Martin: “Basically I think the intent of the SRA is extremely good, if you’re going to criticise it in any way you would say that the follow-up for the various projects that had been implemented by the ICC, there’s difficulty in the follow-ups because of the lack of funding. There’s no provision in many cases to fund the ongoing operation after the first year. For example we have a Market garden which is basically been developed on contributions from the Council and Centre Farm as well as DEET but now that we’ve been into it for nearly a year all these funding sources have run out so right at the moment we’re looking to travel down another path to ensure that the market garden not only remains in place but can be developed to a stage that it’s self sustainable and likely to continue indefinitely”.

Adrian

Noel Hayes lives at Ali Curung and works in the Community Council office, he’s been an important part of the process of informing people in the community of all the policy changes under the Federal governments emergency response.

Noel: “As you know we got the changes to the Commonwealth where they changed the permit act and all this five year lease and with this intervention programs with the managers comin’ in to all the communities in the Territory, we been through this with government mob for the last 6-7 meetings all this year and everybody’s got a fair idea what’s going on now, well they accepted it now anyhow, ain’t nothing they can do”.

Adrian

Under the Federal governments emergency response one of the policy changes is that 50% of people’s money from their dole payments will be quarantined in the community store and their kids have to go to school. We’ll hear more from Noel Hayes about this policy change a bit later.

Another policy change under the emergency response is that the CDEP program will now be scratched and replaced by what’s known as the STEP program. For the past 30 years, the CDEP program has provided the main training and employment opportunities in remote communities. When staff from the Indigenous Coordination Centre in Tennant Creek visited Ali Curung to explain the new STEP program people were quite confused how the STEP program would provide work in their community. Barry Driver

Barry Driver: “I don’t think it has been fully explained to us, we’ve had a meeting and we had someone from Tennant Creek come in and we threw a few questions to them and the thing is they didn’t, they didn’t have the ready answer for some of the questions we gave them so I’m not sure they weren’t too sure themselves. They tried to explain everything but just some of the basic things about the change, the main things that they were talkin’ about was the CDE program thing abolish and change onto some other program, STEP I think it was called, they mentioned STEP but they didn’t explain what STEP was all they said was just changing over from one program to another, from CDEP program to this so called STEP program. A lot of people were very concerned, they want CDEP program to stay, it’s a really good program that keeps most people employed. They should get the relevant people to come here and explain everything from the actual program that we gonna go into, these people who came on Tuesday I think it was, yeah, two people came from town and all they just talked about was actual training was from CDEP to this so called STEP program. They didn’t sort of follow through and explain what the STEP program was really about, we’re not sure about all these new changes. I don’t know why they taking it off you know, it’s been the main stay of all, most communities would, everybody employed, there’s no other sort of employment program apart from CDEP and now everybody’s sort of unsure about what’s gonna happen. It’s a pity that this program which has been going really well for so many years will, training programs you know included in the CDEP as well and now that’s all be gone and it seems to be going backwards, everybody’s really unsure about what’s gonna happen in the future”.

Adrian

Jasmine Brown who works in the home makers program helping to provide food for the elders is also quite confused about all these changes but it doesn’t seem to worry her too much.

Jasmine: “ It’s confusing you know, confusing for me really ‘cause it was alright since the CDEP been in every community, that CDEP gonna be closed down and peoples gotta start working for the dole you know, doesn’t worry me you know I’m like that, maybe worries others, other people work around here you know”.

Adrian

As the project manager of the Share Responsibility Agreements, Vic Martin is also concerned how the STEP program will work in the community especially as there are other changes underway in the Northern Territory to do with establishing shires rather than local community councils.

Vic Martin: “Everybody’s confused, we’ve had meetings with government people and a lot of the key questions that we’ve asked them nobody’s able to answer yet, those key questions are basically, where the money is coming from. We’ve only just started to explore the area of the STEP program and even there we’re still not certain how that’s going to work because the basic infrastructure that the council or the community is going to work under is being confused by the new Barkly Shire that’s coming up in the future and also there is the issue of Ali Curung Council becoming a provider and we don’t know enough yet to know whether Ali Curung Council will become a provider or whether Ali Curung for example would come under Tennant Creek Council”

Adrian

Earlier we heard from Noel Hayes about all these policy changes and how people are gonna have to accept the changes. He explains how under the new STEP program people will now be working under what's known as a 'host agreement' with local organisations.

Noel: "Well the jobs will be still there, all the CDEP will just be change its name to 'work for the dole', that's when they'll be recruiting all the people that are hiding on the dole and they'll have to come into work and work in line but everybody else who's working now will be working on the STEP programs and that'll be a 'host' and if they're working at the school or the shop or the clinic and our mob here down the farm and that, they'll be all on a 'host' what we call a, what they gotta call a 'host' a 'host agreement', the ICC, that's what the DEWR and yeah, that's what ICC and DEWR you know gonna try and get that permanent jobs you know that way"

Adrian: "What is this 'host' program about?"

Noel: "Well that's like I said, they work in the school well they'll be there, they'll have to go through a period of time and after a period of time being hosted on that job we are hoping that, well the government is hoping that they'll get a full-time job in the school or the clinic or the shop or the office even in our office. We gonna put 'em on host, on the host program you know employment thing, yeah so all this reckon, the government reckon this all leads to permanent jobs but I won't comment on that".

Adrian

The other major policy change under the emergency response as we mentioned earlier is the quarantining of 50% of peoples money in the community store. Noel Hayes again.

Noel: "They know all about these, all these mothers and all these people gotta work for the dole and all this changes to their, you know, all this unemployment money and all the money they getting, they'll be gettin' quarantined, all their you know kids don't go to school that money will be quarantined and half of their money will be quarantined to go to the shop or whatever, you know they can buy things for their children it'll be there it'll be just, the shop will be collecting all that, that's through the Centrelink of course you know to take more responsibility for their money they getting off the government, the taxpayers money so you know is what it is so they gotta be made accountable you know so that's why they work for the dole and if they're not doing the right thing you know with their kids money well that'll all be quarantined to the shops and the places you know where they get their food and all that sort of thing".

Adrian: "So how's this quarantine stuff gonna work?"

Noel: "Well, we gotta wait and see because the Centrelinks gotta do that so we just gotta wait and see how they do it".

Adrian

A few final words for Vic Martin about what all these policy changes under the Federal government response really means for the community of Ali Curung.

Vic Martin: "Ah, I think it's going to be harder but we know so little about it that it's difficult to actually engage it, probably the way we look at it now is that it's become really urgent for us to set-up all these SRA projects as quickly as possible to be fully functioning so that they have the potential to employ as many people as we can".

Adrian

That's another edition of Our Place, produced by CAT Productions at the Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs and presented by Adrian Shaw.