



SECURING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS
through appropriate technology

HISTORY

The Centre for Appropriate Technology Inc, known as CAT, is the **national Indigenous science and technology** organisation. Since its foundation in Alice Springs in 1980, CAT has been **developing** and growing and now has regional offices in Far North Queensland, North-West Western Australian and the Top End of Northern Territory.



The story of CAT is unique. It started out as a response to the lack of **suitable technologies** for small remote communities of Indigenous people in Central Australia.



People needed **water** pumps that were easy to maintain and affordable, suitable **stoves** and **water heaters** as well as **shower and ablutions blocks** to serve the small settlements dotted across the arid lands. CAT staff **designed technologies** that were **appropriate** for these purposes. Demand quickly grew.

As CAT developed, so its understanding of technology became more sophisticated. **Appropriate technology** is the range of skills, techniques and knowledge that come together to meet a particular **social, economic, environmental or cultural need**. These needs are not met by technology alone.



Shower block



Windmill with solar panels

For example, to be habitable, small settlements need an **energy service**. Diesel generators can be noisy and expensive. Given the huge resource of **solar energy** in the country, **solar systems** are an obvious choice. But achieving a **reliable and sustainable system** takes much more than the hardware. Users need to be **confident maintainers** of the equipment and they need to know where to go for technical support. Also, they have to be **able to use energy** in a way that supports a better way of life.



Battery Pack



Solar Panels on house

So, looking beyond hardware to consider **people's aspirations**, CAT became involved in **training programs** for young people from the communities in Central Australia covering **vocational skills in carpentry, building, welding and automotive maintenance**. Since then, other trainees have come to CAT and achieved qualifications in their chosen field.



Student tiling



Brick making for construction

One of the most interesting developments in CAT over recent years has been the setting up of **new teams in QLD and WA**. As in Central Australia, the Board of CAT listened to the **needs for services** in each region before working out what the organization could offer. An invitation from **local Indigenous** people was received before the new offices were set up. The character of work in each location is quite different because the **needs** of local people are **different**. The blend of work across Australia now gives CAT a real **opportunity to learn**, to **gather knowledge** and then to **share it with communities** Australia-wide.

Knowledge really is power for remote communities. In an isolated location and with limited **resources**, it is **vitaly important** that people can obtain the **information** they need to make the **right choices**. Not only that, but **managing** a small settlement requires a **range of skills** that urban dwellers take for granted. For example, environmental **health**, financial **management**, maintaining the **roads** and **creek crossings**, keeping the **power system** working.



All these tasks require **support** through a reliable source of **information** and advice. This concept of generating and then sharing high-quality information on **technology** choice and on issues affecting **livelihoods** in remote communities has become central to the modern Centre for Appropriate Technology. Where staff **research** a subject such as transport **viability** or carbon farming or the **design** of gas stoves, so part of the task is achieved.



The challenge is then to make the information available to people in a way that is useful to their particular situation. CAT produces **Our Place** magazine, a **Bush Tech** information sheet each month and regular videos on important subjects such as **housing** or **health**. Tours are offered to visitors to the Centre and **community liaison** staff visit communities on a regular basis. Our Place was launched as a **radio program** which is aired regularly through the **National Indigenous Radio Network**.



CAT has come a long way, but the **challenges** for Indigenous people in **remote areas** remain acute. As the numbers of people living in **remote communities** and the numbers of settlements is set to rise over the coming years, so the need to **services** will increase. Whether through new approaches to **energy** services, harnessing the benefits of the digital revolution or tackling the task of gaining the basic **necessities for life**, people will need a place from where they can draw on the **knowledge** and experience of others. CAT's job is to help secure **sustainable livelihoods** through **appropriate technology**.