

# DESERT LIVES

Livelihoods Inland research project

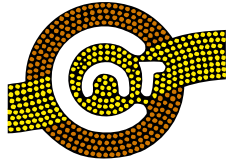


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Centre for  
Appropriate  
Technology



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Technology**

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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.

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**Adrian**

In the Desert Knowledge CRC research projects there are researchers in universities and scientists from the CSIRO who are working with aboriginal people on how traditional knowledge of deserts can create livelihoods in remote communities. The Livelihoods Inland Research Project is being undertaken by Dr Jocelyn Davies of the CSIRO and is probably one of the bigger research projects. It's looking at how jobs or livelihoods can be created for aboriginal people working in the area of land management. One of the main reasons why jobs or livelihoods can be created in the area of land management is because of the traditional knowledge that aboriginal people hold when their looking after the environment in the desert. When we talk about the environment in the deserts we're talking about the bio diversity which makes up the deserts, all the plants and animals. We're going to present the Livelihoods Inland Research Project to you in a 2 part series of Desert Lives, Desert Lives. In this segment, Part 1, we're looking at 2 areas of land managements, how this can be a strong motivator for aboriginal people working on their land and how governments are starting to recognise that the traditional things that aboriginal people do on their land actually supports the governments view about creating stronger bio diversities as Dr Jocelyn Davies explains, governments has often looked at scientists as the experts of understanding our environments when the traditional knowledge that aboriginal people hold on deserts is also expert knowledge and can help create livelihoods in remote communities.

**Jocelyn Davies:** "I work in science and around the world it's now been recognised by scientists that traditional knowledge adds so much to our understanding of the land. How has traditional knowledge actually helped people get stronger livelihoods? That value of traditional knowledge isn't widely recognised and governments for example often look to scientists as experts rather than to aboriginal land holders as experts in what needs to be done on the land. What we tried to do in create stronger livelihoods through land management through natural and cultural resource management is better incentives and better ways of recognising the contribution that aboriginal people can make on their land. Starting with the knowledge that people already have that comes from language and connection to land, things people learn and observe about the land. There are things that aboriginal people want out of their own land, often people want the land to be in good condition because it will feed them, like aboriginal people have often said to me, the countries in good condition if it can feed you, and there's a lot of work that goes into that like burning in the right places, like understanding when different plants are ready or not and people in the old days had a strong livelihood through that connection with land and they had an economy from it, but these days, you know things have changed, like the land is in worse condition and also people want more things in their lives than they had in the old days like cars and vehicles and houses. So, how do we get a strong livelihood in these days from the land in knowing that the land is not in as good condition as it used to be? The kinds of things that aboriginal people are doing on country to restore the land range from looking after waterholes, keeping the feral animals, donkeys and camels out of the water holes through to burning, to make different kinds of habitats at different ages for different plants and animals. These kinds of things that people are doing and some of those kinds of things governments recognise as supporting stronger bio diversity and conservation on land".

**Adrian**

One of the biggest issues that aboriginal people have to deal with when working in the field of land management is the problem of trying to secure ongoing funding. Often, the aboriginal ranger groups and the aboriginal land management centres have depended on their funding provided through CDEP, a community development employment program as Jocelyn Davies points out, with CDEP funding being reduced in remote communities by the federal governments. Part of her research is looking at other ways for how the land management programs can create livelihoods for aboriginal people.

**Jocelyn:** "The thing about aboriginal people working in land management is that it is a really strong motivator for lots of aboriginal people, it uses skills and knowledge that they have and it provides a way to learn more and build on that skills and knowledge and work with other people like work with scientists and feral animal specialists and wildlife specialists to extend their networks and knowledge, so it can be a really strong motivator but the big issue that aboriginal land management has faced is some security of funding often the money that's available is in short term grants and it might just be for one project and it doesn't provide a continuity into the future for the effort that the people are putting in, so some aboriginal land holders have developed community ranger groups or land management centres that provide a place that where they can source money from a number of sources and use it to develop a ranger force but most of those centres have been reliant on CDEP funding and now as we know CDEP funding is changing and it's been less available for those kinds of activities. We have been looking at how you can develop these kinds of strong land management programs in other ways other than an employment model and other than relying on CDEP resources".

### **Adrian**

When we talk about having a livelihood people assume that it's just a job which brings in our income, a livelihood is much more than a job, it's also about having good health and wellbeing, basically feeling good about what you're doing in your field of work. Jocelyn highlights that in the near future when people create livelihoods in land management with remote communities going down the road of a jobs model may not work, instead, by creating a sustainable livelihood in the area of land management people feel good about themselves because it's a cultural motivator for aboriginal people to be working on their traditional lands.

**Jocelyn:** "A livelihood we think of as more than a job and if you think about a reason why people go into a job it can be just for the money but it's never a really satisfying job if it's just for the money usually there's something about the job that if you're really keen to do your job there's something about it that's more than the money, it might be the people that you work with or the kind of work that you're doing that's making a difference or the fact that you've got new opportunities opening up or a career structure or something and it's making you feel good, all of that. So when we talk about a livelihood we're not just talking about a job that will give you money, we're talking about a livelihood being something that gives you health and wellbeing and income, that idea of feeling good, being healthy and happy, providing for your family through income but also through your health and well being and that's what we talk about when we talk about sustainable livelihoods. So, aboriginal people on country, they have things that really culturally motivated the important things for them to do on country and if they don't have a chance to do those things then people often don't feel good about themselves and don't feel good about the country and a lot of those kind of culturally motivated things aren't really recognised as proper jobs to do on country. So if land management just goes into a jobs kind of model, you do worry about how all of those important things that aboriginal people do in their relationship with their country if they're actually gonna get done".

### **Adrian**

Creating these sustainable livelihoods in land management, giving people a sense of wellbeing while working on their land is a good outcome. Here Jocelyn clarifies how traditional practices help establish sustainable livelihoods on the land, for example the patch burning on the land has other outcomes for both the government and indigenous people. For the government it has the conservation outcome where they know stronger bio diversities are established, where as for aboriginal people these traditional methods could not only secure livelihood for a group of traditional people to be resourced as a team to patch burn the land but also get other outcomes in health and wellbeing.

**Jocelyn:** "Another way of looking at land management is to rather than think about a jobs model of people doing different jobs like feral animals and weeds and stuff, is to think about land management as something that produces outcomes for aboriginal people and also outcomes for society so where is the, where is the overlap between what it is that aboriginal people want out of country and what governments and other people want out of the management of their country, and some things that aboriginal people do on country they're really strongly motivated to do like patch burning do have outcomes for conservation that government wants. So those are places where we can look at putting in some incentives to get people to more of that sort of work. That work doesn't have to be done as a standard job, you could have people who are burning in a certain way to meet a target that they're resourced as a small business or as an outstation business to meet that target and set the challenge if you like for that group of land holders to work out what is the best way that they see to do that".

### **Adrian**

A major problem the research project has identified is that growing on the land across the desert such as bush tomatoes, sometimes aren't that well recognised by mainstream Australian society. So how do we then get society to understand that land management also has great conservation benefits to the community as well as the benefits that flow back to the aboriginal community?

**Jocelyn:** "Lot's of people we talk to say they want to stay living on their country and there isn't much for an economy in the remote settlements, so how do we get stronger livelihoods for people through their country, and that's the main emphasise of the Livelihoods Inland project from Desert Knowledge CRC and it's saying that, that some things the people produce on their land are actually not well recognised and paid for by the rest of society. So aboriginal people support on their land a lot of conservation, a lot of bio diversity, you know the diversity of plants and animals, and those things are important to the rest of Australia, but the public benefit isn't going back to aboriginal people to support having that land management work done. So how do you get the connection between the land owner on the ground and this broader public benefit?"

## **Adrian**

If these sustainable livelihoods are going to succeed in remote communities, indigenous people have to be able to get their traditional products into the Australian mainstream markets. To do this they've identified what's known as a 'value chain' which needs to be built between the remote communities and the markets. This is where aboriginal organisations and other people work with aboriginal people helping to promote their traditional products, in this value chain, the people who promote the traditional products in the communities are known as the 'broker roles', these people also understand the complex business of governments so they can access the funding programs of governments for communities.

**Jocelyn:** "We think of it in terms of a value chain whether land holders producing something and the general Australian taxpayer wants something but you've actually got to make the connections between those two otherwise the general Australian public doesn't know what aboriginal people are doing on the ground and the land holders don't really know what it is the Australian public want. You need to build a value chain to connect between those two and that value chain includes people like aboriginal organisations that work with land holders to actually make more visible what it is the land holders are doing, make more awareness of those things, and also there's private sector groups and conservation non-government groups in those roles and we call them broker roles, they're intermediary roles and they're the people who understand the land holders and can talk their language and also understand the language of government when it's putting in funding programs, or of what the mining industry might want in terms of it's connections with aboriginal people for conservation environment work, they talk the language both ways. I've said just there that those people in the broker roles are organisations like aboriginal organisations, outstation resource agencies, land councils, enterprise arms of aboriginal organisations and also non-government conservation groups but they're actually lots of really important individuals in that middle ground space, people who have got strong connections with aboriginal groups and then they've got the way of speaking to government as well or to specialist outsiders, they have a really important role in this value chain. If you're talking about art, the value of aboriginal people's art into the art market isn't just because we have great painters out in, you know, desert and in the top end of Australia doing fantastic, it's actually because there are art centres, there are galleries, there are people who buy and sell art who make the connection between the remote artists and into that market who wants the art. In the land management area this value chain is very poorly developed at the moment and it's complicated one to develop. The value chain for land management is complicated to develop because what aboriginal people are actually producing when they're doing work on country, they're not just producing land that's in good condition, they're producing health and wellbeing outcomes for their own people".

## **Adrian**

That's another edition of Desert Lives, Desert Lives about the knowledge of deserts in Australia. In part 2 we'll be taking a look at the 'value chain' in the land management area, how the 'broker roles' in land management will play a critical role in achieving good outcomes for the remote communities and governments.