Global Journal of human-social science: h Interdisciplinary
Volume 14 Issue 2 Version1.0 Year2014
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Indigenous Australians Overcoming Vulnerability to Employability by Creating a Viable Labour Market for Local Challenges

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GJHSS-H Classification: FOR Code: 939908, 750101

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

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Abstract- **Australian Indigenous people experience severe labour market disadvantage due to constraints embedded in technology, inclination to work, formal education, lack of job experience as well as geographic factors. Indigenous precarious employment grows in prominence when there is an absence of jobs and particularly in remote regions of Australia where intergenerational unemployment is the norm. In the remote Gove Peninsula of the Northern Territory of Australia many English illiterate and innumerate people, without previous employment, have overcome vulnerability to employment by engaging with an educational vocational scheme in a networking arrangement with government agencies and the resident mining corporation Rio Tinto. This paper voices the Indigenous work relevant accomplishments during the two and one half years after installment of the programme, that is grounded in the interests and sensitivity to cultural continuities of the local Yolngu people.**

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I. Introduction

A lineage of studies has detailed knowledge of reasons for Australian Indigenous low labour force participation. The Henderson Commission of Inquiry (1975), and subsequent investigations (Altman, 2009; Biddle, 2010; Borland & Hunter, 2000; Hunter, 2009; Stephens, 2010) have revealed there is an array of barriers faced by Indigenous Australians in their pursuit of employment. Embraced in this literature and other writings (Altman, 2006; Gilbert, 2002; Hunter and Gray, 2012; Johns, 2011; Tiplady and Barclay, 2007) are contentions the probability of Australian Indigenous people obtaining employment can be influenced by numerous social political, technical and structural factors including decision to participate in paid work, dealing with prejudice, lack of training and technology inability skill sets, an absence of jobs, proximity to the labour market and reluctance to travel, or strong cultural attachments interfering with traditional labour market requirements. Collectively, these and other issues negatively contribute to Indigenous people finding employment or adversely affect job retention.

In particular, the role of education has been emphasised as having a causal effect on labour market outcomes. Pocock and colleagues (2011) reported a connection between employment, and literacy and numeracy to the extent lower literate workers are twice as likely to be employed in lesser paid jobs. In Australia Indigenous people are a minority group, who have for a long time been overly vulnerable to employment (Gray and Hunter, 2011; Taylor and Hunter, 1997) because of their consistent disengagement from the national education system (Gray and Hunter, 2002; Giddy, Lopez and Redman, 2009). The precariousness of employability for Indigenous people manifests when they live in rural or remote regions where there are insufficient jobs (Gray, Hunter and Lohoar, 2012).

Often acknowledged are consequences for incompatible balancing of Australian Indigenous aspirations with employment conditions of a wage economy. In regional communities Indigenous people are likely to be engaged in a fundamentally different lifestyle (Hunter & Gray, 2012; Jordan and Mavec, 2010) to urban Aboriginal people. Frequently, in remote regions of the nation living patterns are strongly attached to kinship obligations and familial networks within settings of collective benefits (Foley, 2006; Trudgen, 2000). Often the inhabitants are wedded to welfare, they practice hunter gatherer pursuits and engage in traditional ceremonial obligations (Altman, 2002; 2003; Madison, 2008; Muir, 2011; Pearson, 2006; Pearson and Daff, 2013a). These environments, that are considerably different to industrial work surroundings, are inclined to have high Indigenous unemployment (Hunter, 2009; Stephens, 2010). When alternative traditional lifestyles are available few Indigenous Australians are challenged to commit to regular employment careers antithetical to Aboriginal interests.

Faced with poor employment prospects the Yolngu Indigenous community on the remote Gove Peninsula of the Northern Territory (NT) of Australia created their own sustainable jobs. The Yolngu Elders engaged in a tripartite partnership with the resident global miner Rio Tinto and the Australian government to install a vocational educational training (VET) scheme to train local Indigenous people, who were generally

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illiterate and innumerate. The notion exploited by the Indigenous Elders was the trained graduates could become employed in a variety of 'green' type jobs, and non industrial work placements. The jobs were identified and appropriate learning and skilling was undertaken at the mining company training facilities and the Nhulunbuy Technical and Further Education (TAFE) centre. Yolngu Elders created a diversified 'green' industry thereby providing sustainable jobs for the trained Indigenous men and women, who were able to build local infrastructure creating a range of work sites and a variety of marketable needed consumer goods. This paper describes the accomplishments and the anticipated future destiny of the regional Indigenous people as they build their lives and rebuild their communities. The location of this remote region and the sites nominated in the following pages is shown as Figure 1.

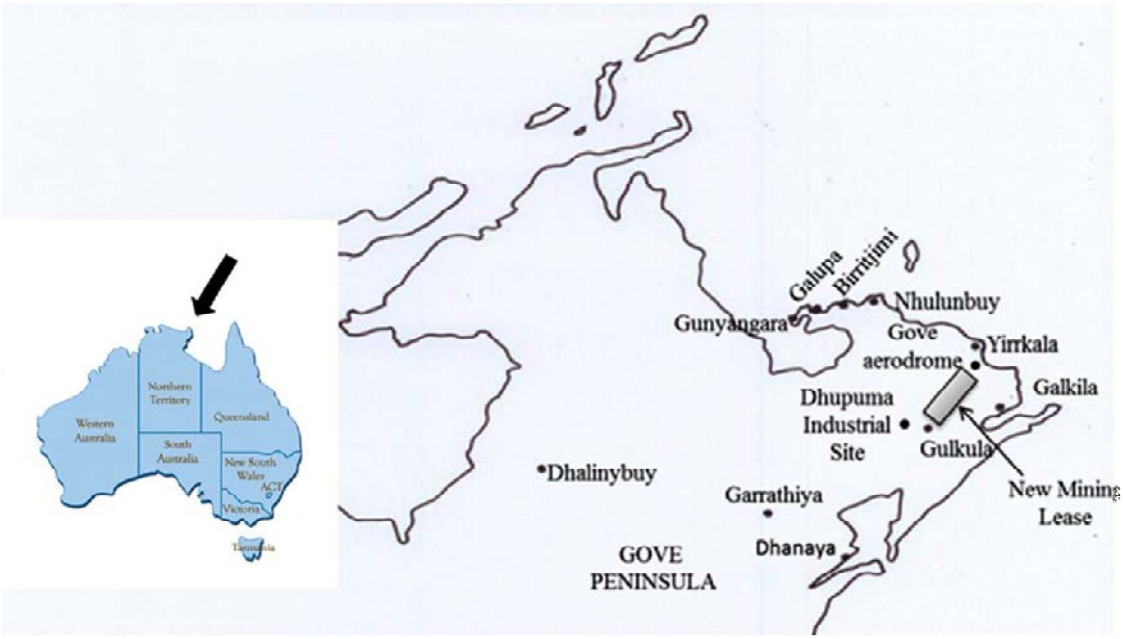

Figure 1: The Gove Peninsula and Indigenous Outland Centres

a) Indigenous issues and new directions

Relative to the wider population Australian Aboriginals have for many decades experienced poor mainstream employment prospects. Despite Australian government welfare to work reforms as well as social environmental and financial incentives such as the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme (Altman, Gray and Levitus, 2005; Hunter, 2003) as policy efforts to increase the employment rate of Indigenous people, a lack of sustainable employment has persisted in the Indigenous marginalised communities, that comprises about 2.7% of the nation's population (Hunter, 2010; Biddle, Taylor and Yap, 2009). Labour market disadvantage manifests as lower incomes and higher unemployment rates acknowledged to underpin a range of socio economic indicators. The more dominant indices being poverty (Altman, 2007); poorer and unhygienic housing (Remote Housing NT, 2013); high risk to obesity, diabetics, liver and cardiovascular diseases (Closing the Gap, 2010; Rowley et al., 2000); chronic substance abuse in the form of alcohol consumption, volatile substance sniffing and recreational drugs (Midford et al., 2011; Wilson et al., 2010); suicides, lower life expectancy as well as greater family violence and burgeoning incarceration rates (Katijin, 2011; McGuirk, 2011; Rowley et al., 2000;). Indigenous Australians are at a higher risk than the non Indigenous community, and in remote Aboriginal regions the levels are burdensome.

Numerous barriers to Australian Indigenous sustainable employment have been identified. Foremost is the role of education and relevant training for the modern world where the intensification of technological advancement obliges diversity in specialised skills and a belief in the dignity of work (Johns, 2011; Jordan and Mavec, 2010; Tiplady and Barclay, 2007). Yet often Indigenous people, and particularly those from regional and remote Australian centres, have low levels of English literacy and functional numeracy (Hughes, 2008). Moreover, few have responded favourably to government programmes requiring them to commute to jobs as they hold a preference for vestiges of their earlier rich cultural heritage and choose to live on their ancestral lands (Altman, 2002; Muir, 2011). Indigenous Australians are immersed in the Dreaming (Stanner, 1979), which describes the travels of the ancestral spirits; and the relationships between land, animals, and

people leading to protocols for behaviour (Altman, 2003; Voit and Drury, 1997). These strong connections foster customary responsibilities to ensure social and economic viability for land and sea management when undertaking primary forms of economic development and employment.

Although Indigenous Australians face many obstacles to securing mainstream jobs the greatest vulnerability for employment is when the people reside in locations where there are insufficient work opportunities. On the remote Gove Peninsula of the NT where there are few long term jobs, particularly with the recent mothballing of the Rio Tinto refinery the Yolngu Clans have increased the probability of employment through working partnerships to establish organisations for facilitating Yolngu culture and customary ways of caring for land and sea estates. This paper focusses on the job creation scheme that was installed in 2012 for the mostly unemployed illiterate and innumerate Indigenous men and women in the lower levels of the paternalistic clan structure.

b) Enabling Indigenous job creation

The Yolngu people have been progressively exposed to contemporary technology since the arrival of the missionaries. In 1935 the Methodist Church mission was established at Yirrkala, and the Yolngu clans began to congregate there for Christian religious instruction and material sustenance requiring these Indigenous people, whose forebears had been the first Australians 50,000 years earlier, to learn Western knowledge and use rudimentary technical equipment and work practices to undertake agriculture pursuits (McKenzie, 1976; Shepherdson, 1981). Later, in 1943 when a military aerodrome was built at the now Gove airport rich bauxite ore was used as gravel was unavailable, and some Yolngu men were involved in the war effort (Department of Defence, 1978; Thomson, 2006). After the war, during the 1960s, the mining town of Nhulunbuy (15 km from Yirrkala) was built as was the refinery and the minesite. Some Yolngu women and men worked for a short time using the contemporary technologies during these building operations (Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen, 1984). From the mid 1970s until 2011 only a handful of Indigenous Yolngu had acquired educational and vocational competencies enabling them to be employed in sustainable jobs in the mining operations at Nhulunbuy (Pearson and Daff, 2011; 2013b). But today the Yolngu people are being challenged to find a fine balance between tradition and modernity.

A sea change in improving the job prospects of Yolngu men and women occurred in 2011. On the 8th of June 2011 the Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, ratified the historic Land Use Agreement (LUA) with the Yolngu Traditional Land Owners (TLOs) at Yirrkala. The first mining lease had been undertaken in the late 1960s under a colonial land licensing agreement that dispossessed and marginalised local Indigenous inhabitants giving the mining operator almost uninhibited access to the land (Crawley and Sinclair, 2003). But the 1993 Native Title legislation recognises Indigenous people have access to native title compelling international mining corporations to become major investors in the world of Australian Aboriginals (Brereton and Parmenter, 2008; Harvey and Brereton, 2005). While the LUAs have a financial component a common emerging feature is provision for training and employment (Barker, 2006; Hogan and Tedesco, 2003).

Within seven months of ratification of the LUA the first VET programme for local Yolngu people had commenced. A section of the agreement is devoted to a goal of increasing Aboriginal participation in work readiness training and career advancements. Specifically, the LUA stipulates the mining operator (Rio Tinto) will in consultation with the TLOs develop a regional employment and training strategy. By the 7th of November 2011 the TLO leaders had agreed to the membership of a Working Group, that had representatives of 1) the mining operator, 2) the Gumatj Clan, and 3) the Rirratjingu Clan. The Working Group met on the 1st December 2011 and identified:

- The types of 'green' jobs to be created,
- The VET curriculum for these jobs,
- The training institutions for delivery of the VET course,
- The work projects that would incorporate the learned skills, and
- The commencement date of the VET programme, which was the 30th January 2012.

The Nhulunbuy Indigenous VET programme has several attributes. A salient feature is the scheme name – Ralpa, which translated from the mother tongue means to get things done quickly. The Ralpa brand is now widely acknowledged in the local region. The participants also shaped the curriculum. Most of the trainees were wedded to the government income support system of welfare as they were unemployed, a few had in the past been intermittently participants of the CDEP scheme that provides short term part time work (Altman and Gray, 2005; Hunter, 2003), but a majority of the candidates were English illiterate, and indeed, almost all of the women preferred to speak in their mother tongue. When a sample of 49 applicants were tested with a national reading measure (Shearer, Cheshire and Apps, 1975, The Burt Reading Test, 1974) it was found their English reading age was 7.8 years. One disturbing finding of the mandatory medical examination was the high incidence of recreational drug (cannabis) use. The programme was sensitive to Indigenous aspirations of hunter gatherer pursuits, and strong spiritual and religious connections with ancestral lands so a work week was capped at four days allowing

time for these distinctive Aboriginal purposes and traditional activities. In a VET programme of eight weeks with the morning session focussing on job safety, work readiness, and skill acquisition of hand tools, coupled with the opportunity to practice these competencies in the afternoon on projects supervised by Indigenous and non Indigenous trainers remarkable achievements were obtained. A total of 80% (78 of 97) of the trainees graduated and became employed in mainline jobs. This information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Ralpa and Goyurr programmes vocational achievements

Ralpa #	Date commenced	Recruitment pool	Selected by Elders	Graduated employed
1	Feb 2012	15	15	12
2a	May 2012	21	16	14
2	May 2012	11	8	8
3	Sept 2012	21	12	10
4	Feb 2013	17	15	11
5	Sept 2013	29	16	11
6	Feb 2014	19	15	12
	Totals	133	97	78

Explaining the values shown in Table 1 reveals how community engagement is connected to the Indigenous enterprise context. The number of Ralpa programmes was determined by the aggregate of forecasted job vacancies and the capacity of the delivery resources. A nominal two programmes a year with 15 participants in each programme was initially set, but enthusiasm by the Yolngu women to operate a community store and a coffee shop at Gunyangara, and a need for skilled workers saw an extension to the scheme during 2012. The women named their programme Goyurr meaning a journey. A recruitment pool is developed by considerable community engagement, that was compressed for the first Ralpa programme, but the extensive empathy and commitment to be involved in the inaugural programme is reflected in 12 of the 15 trainees graduating into sustainable jobs. Normally, there is widespread negotiation and consultation between the VET programme deliverers and the community the nomination of the potential participants of the Ralpa or Goyurr programmes. The expectation of some leakages by Indigenous people who had never intended to undertake a working career extended the recruitment pool during the first two years to 133 candidates.

Table 1 shows reasonably optimistic job number targets were set. Despite the ready availability of income support (welfare), accessibility of mining royalties, the common practice of kinship humbugging from family members, low English literacy in Indigenous communities transitioning from an oral culture, minimal or no previous work experience requiring a considerable mindset change, and a preference for a traditional hunter gatherer lifestyle in the short term many Yolngu men and women transitioned into meaningful work. The losses also attract comment. Some lost enthusiasm to join the VET programme, others failed the mandatory medical examination, while a few had indifferent dispositions during the interview process and the two day recruitment period prior to the commencement of the VET programme so they were excused as "… cultural attitudes to work among some Indigenous Australians are incompatible with mainstream work practices" (Jordan and Mavec, 2010: 25). The 19 Yolngu who left during the VET programme were in two categories – involuntary and voluntary. Two Indigenous men were removed to serve custodial sentences, and six were dismissed for continually presenting unfit for work. One lady left for personal family reasons while others withdrew before the graduation ceremony. During the Ralpa programmes a great deal of community infrastructure has been built to provide work places for other graduates, particularly the women.

c) Building social structures, jobs and community

In the first decade of the 21st century the Gumatj Corporation began building Indigenous social entrepreneurship. Initially, the Gumatj Clan established a cattle station on their ancestral land at Garrathiya (land of the cycads) with 350 Braham cattle, some 100 km south, south east of Nhulunbuy. A need for timber planks for bridge tops, floor boards for house verandahs, and platforms for water tanks and other structural timbers attracted assistance from the Jack Thompson Foundation (the iconic Australian actor). The Foundation sent John Mofflin to Garrathiya to show Indigenous men how to fell NT stringy bark (eucalyptus terradonta) trees and mill the logs on the property with a Lucas Mill (Territory, 2008). These events were driven by an ambition of Galarrwuy Yunipungu AM Elder statesman of the Gumatj Clan, who announced in a recent interview: "My vision was my people need to eat and one way was with fresh meat. Thus, the idea of the cattle station at Garrathiya.". To achieve this goal would require a greater herd size and fenced holding yards, accommodation for workers, and an abattoir for slaughtering the cattle. These projects and other community infrastructures have been accomplished in the productive employment of Indigenous Yolngu, including graduates of the Ralpa and Goyurr

programmes, through their involvement in training and ability to employ contemporary technology.

The accumulation of Gumatj Corporation assets accelerated after 2008. This intensification began with the Gumatj Corporation forming partnerships with Foresty Tasmania, the University of Tasmania, Department of Architecture, and the Fairbrother Group which is the largest construction company in Tasmania. Foresty Tasmania provided supervisory capacity for a small team of Yolngu men who felled selected NT stringy bark trees and milled the logs to structural building timber (Pearson and Helms, 2010a). The group worked in the savannah forest mid way between Dhanaya and Garrathiya. Two building supervisors from the Fairbrother Group gave instruction to a group of Yolngu men, who built a five room accommodation bunkhouse with 20 tonnes of the milled timber at the Garrathiya cattle station. This building was architecturally designed by the University of Tasmania, and was the first of this category in the NT (Arafura Times, 2009). During 2010 most of these men, with the same supervisors, built a large house on the shores of Port Bradshaw at Dhanya (Pearson and Helms, 2010b), and in this same year timber was transported to Gunyangara for air drying and when seasoned in the following year a small group of Yolngu men were supervised by a cabinet maker from Melbourne to make five boardroom tables (Pearson and Helms, 2011). Throughout 2010 and 2011 a number of timber based projects were undertaken (e.g., verandahs to houses, fencing of Indigenous houses, commencement of the building of a school) by Yolngu men. However, a relentless demand for Aboriginal community assets on the Gove Peninsula, that the Australian governments had not been able to provide, underscored a need for a larger Indigenous skilled workforce, which moulded the content of the 2011 LUA.

Installation of the Ralpa and Goyurr programmes facilitated an outburst in local Indigenous labour force participation. Beginning as working members of these VET schemes and after graduation secured an increasing Indigenous labour supply to enable the undertaking of productive work. Early in 2012 the Gunyangara community school was completed by the men (some painting was done by local women) prior to the commencement of the Goyurr programme enabling those women participants with children to put them in care before departing on the 7.30 am bus for the Nhulunbuy training centres. At Gulkula a one hectare industrial site, with bitumen and concrete hardstand from the defunct European Launcher Development Operations in the late 1960s (Pretty, nd), was secured when the Yolngu men erected security fencing with two, four metre wide gates in each corner. On this site a large shed was erected for stabling two Lucas Mills and two Mahoe saws, the latter for fine milling of timber for furniture construction. In April 2012 Yolngu men began constructing a small abattoir at Garrathiya under periodic guidance and instruction from visiting officers of the NT Department of Resources. By the close of 2012 selected trees were being felled on the new gazetted mining lease and the logs were transported to the industrial site for slabbing to make garden furniture for sale to the Nhulunbuy non Indigenous population or the timber was milled for further construction projects.

A growing Indigenous trained labour force enabled greater intensification of job creation in 2013. Three projects were undertaken at Gunyangara within 200 metres (m) of the new school buildings. First, there was a community store and store room complex (30m x 20m); second a coffee shop (15m x 15m); and third, an arts show room (20m x 10m) adjoining the side of the furniture shop. All of these (mostly timber) buildings were in the precincts of the Gunyangara horticulture centre, that was operated by the local Indigenous women. While timber items of household furniture (e.g., small tables, boxes, cupboards) were made in the furniture shop by Indigenous men and women graduates of the Ralpa and Goyurr programmes a notable project was the manufacture of a number of different sized beds. In conjunction with Health Department representatives, who gave instruction to the Indigenous women in the use of cleaning and sanitising products, the beds enabled new mattresses to be placed above the floor to eliminate an endemic outbreak of scabies. Throughout 2013 extensive refurbishment of assets for the Garma Festival was undertaken at Gulkula. A new covered presentation complex (50m x 50m), two new toilets and ablution blocks (30m x 10m), a new coffee shop (10m x 10m), a covered dining area (50m x 40m), and a large elevated dais for the oval were completed., before the September ceremony. The main component of the structural elements of these facilities was NT stringy bark logs and milled timber prepared at the Dhupuma industrial site.

In the timeframe from mid 2012 to mid 2014 there were a number of non timber based job placements. The Indigenous women of the Goyurr programme had their course tailored for them to receive training in horticulture, retailing, culinary and baristaing as well as attention to health and cleanliness in food preparation particularly in butchering and filleting fish. Some six women were employed by the Marngarr Resource centre to operate the Gunyangara horticulture nursery, that supplied plants and shrubs to the general public, to the mining company for revegetating mined areas, and to the Nhulunbuy Corporation Limited for town parks and gardens. Four Indigenous women worked in the community store and a further three women managed the coffee shop and operated the equipment when serving customers, many who are non Indigenous. Recent notable additions to the Nhulunbuy Indigenous female workforce are two graduates who now work daily shifts in the district hospital (Pearson,

2014). When the boned out carcasses are delivered from Garrathiya four women work in the cutting room of the Gunyangara crocodile farm where under supervision of a qualified non Indigenous butcher meat cuts are prepared as well as sausages and mince products are made. Quantities of mince are delivered to the Nhulunbuy bakery for filling of pies shells, and when baked the pies are sold in the community store together with the meat products. Gunyangara is an Indigenous community of some 45 houses, to be expanded in 2014, with a transient population at times reaching 600 people providing these and future trained women with secure employment prospects.

A number of the men who completed the Ralpa programme are now employed in sustainable jobs within the precincts of Nhulunbuy. For example, seven men from the inaugural Ralpa programme have been continuously employed at the Dhupuma industrial site milling NT stringy bark logs, that have been cut from the nearby new mining lease by another independent group of Indigenous men (Arafura Times, 2014a). Five men and their supervisor comprise the team responsible for maintaining the grounds of the town flats and at various times the yards of the 800 houses owned by the resident mining company. Six men are employed by Deltareef, a national building corporation, that is contracted to maintain these town premises, and four others are in a team with Deltareef supervisors upgrading houses at Gunyangara and Yirrkala (Arafura Times, 2014b). Three Indigenous men obtained jobs in a private firm that undertakes horticultural activities for the schools, government facilities and some private home owners in Nhulunbuy. A further eight men, after graduating returned to their employer (e.g., Bunuwal Industrial, Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation) with improved work skills. Four Indigenous men found employment with Sodexo the international catering and security corporation that services Gove House and Arnhem Village for the single person accommodation of mining personnel. Notably, these new jobs were occurring in a period when Australian job growth has slumped alarmingly (The West Australian, 2014).

d) Reflections

The Yolngu people of east Arnhem Land are engaged in a fundamentally different customary economy to the mainstream Australian society. In this extremely remote region the Indigenous people reside in communities with non viable labour markets, and, consequently, few are in sustainable jobs. Even the Yolngu artists, who live in dispersed homelands within 200 km of Nhulunbuy, and provide a cottage industry of artwork, sculpturing, weaving and jewellery (Brody, 2011) for the international market place, give preference for regular attendance at ceremonies, funerals, and rituals keeping them out of work activities for extended periods. Within their hybrid economy there is widespread involvement with traditional hunter gatherer pursuits (Altman, 2002), that are further barriers to conventional patterns of working normally undertaken by employees in cosmopolitan centres, Further evidence of atypical employment of Aboriginals in regional Australia is the low employment rates in mining workforces (Brereton and Parmenter, 2008; Jordan and Mavec, 2010; Pearson and Daff, 2013a; b; Tiplady and Barelay, 2007). In spite of mining companies operating in remote regions of Australia where the Indigenous population is high their vocational representation is unfavourable.

The Yolngu clans have chosen to embed their new found work regimes mainly in 'green' jobs. Blanch (2008) writes the tropical zone of northern Australia has been conserved and sustainably managed by a culture of over 50,000 years, and today many of the Indigenous communities retain strong connections to the country. The unique kin based lifestyle of the people (Altman, 2003; Foley, 2006), who live on their ancestral lands for which they have strong religious attachment, is wedded to the Dreamtime (Muir, 2011; Suter, 2003) to link responsibilities for land management. The importance for the land was highlighted in a statement attributed to the prominent Elder Yolngu Galarrwuy Yunupingu AM.

For Aboriginal people there is literally no life without the land. The land is where our ancestors came from in the Dreamtime, and it is where we shall return. The land binds our fathers, ourselves and our children together. If we lose our land, we have literally lost our lives and spirits, and no amount of social welfare or compensation can ever make it up to us. (Resource Indigenous Perspectives, 2007: 1).

Independently, David Collard, a leading Indigenous spokesperson for the Noongar people of the south west of Western Australia claimed Aboriginal people would rather choose to have green friendly jobs that heal the land rather than mining jobs that tear up the landscape (Macdonald, 2012). In support of this notion the Wiradjuri people of central New South Wales put substantial emphasis on traditional ecological knowledge. These announcements give broad concepts for meaning and substance why the primary form of economic development for Indigenous people in regional Australia is energised in vocational pursuits that preserve their extensive ecosystems.

The Ralpa and Goyurr programmes resonate with respect and acknowledgement of community aspirations. Considerable knowledge (Miller, 2005; Wallace et al, 2008; Young, Guenther and Boyle, 2007) identifies effective training schemes for Indigenous people are reliant on nurturing partnerships ensuring the VET delivery is culturally appropriate and develops work based learning approaches. A key starting point is the central importance of Indigenous authority (Johns, 2011) and this is achieved through the participation of Elders

and other community members, including family, in the recruitment and selection of candidates. Shared ownership of the learning relationships and partnership is realised in community processes leading to the nomination of potential candidates, who then enter a two day assessment period at the delivery centres. At the close of this time, in a formal setting, relevant managers and deliverers of the programme, meet with the Elders, who analyse the presented data (e.g., medical examination report, candidate attendance), and select the candidates for the course to start in the next week. Throughout the programme Indigenous family as well as community members, and also importantly the Elders, are actively involved in the observation of the VET course activities, they can be presenters of curriculum items, and can be supervisors of work projects. Hence, the teaching centres (e.g., TAFE) become part of the life of the community.

Indigenous forms of learning are extremely complex and present enormous challenges for the deliverers of the VET programmes. Answering the challenge leads to respectful ways of comparing Western and Indigenous methods of learning. Foremost is through exploring, observing and then replicating the processes used by the 'clever' members of the Indigenous community who are the controllers and repositories of Indigenous knowledge. Knowledge of traditional learning techniques can be systematically acquired by visiting remote outstations on invitations, by attending the Yirrkala Buka Larrngay Mulka Art Centre where skilled artists apply and teach the skills to less knowledgeable Indigenous people, or by examining the visual electronic records that are a legacy from past anthropologists (e.g., Dunlop, 1995). These actions reveal Indigenous learning takes place in day to day activities where skills are acquired mainly by vocal (stories), visual (observation), and practice (imitation). This holistic pedagogy is anchored in the Ralpa and Goyurr programme in a four stage procedure when the instructor 1) Demonstrates, 2) Explains, and 3) Describes; and then the candidates 4) Initiates and imitates the work behaviours with testing by the instructor. These learning stages replicate genealogical ties between the course participants and their ancestral heritage.

Literacy and numeracy is not an entrance barrier to a Ralpa or Goyurr programme. Indeed, most of the Indigenous women spoke in their mother tongue, and several of the men of the Ralpa programme were also English illiterate and innumerate. Nevertheless, a large number of these people are productive workers in their communities. Indigenous Australians are from an oral culture and they 'write' their culture in their artworks, which a 'reader' can interpret in the absence of the artist. The Ralpa and Goyurr class rooms and work sites are noisy places as Indigenous bilingual members translate for other members or even complete their documentation so the team can advance. And while literacy and numeracy are necessary throughout the Ralpa and Goyurr programmes to develop expertise and acquire national accreditation during the selection process the Elders give scant concern for literacy and numeracy competencies. The Elder judgements are pragmatically aligned;

1. Will the applicant be able to do the course, and
2. On graduation will the person be able to do the offered job.

Sanctions can apply and candidates are aware of them. The Elder are aware the clan resides in a culture of social capital and there will always be networks of kinship blood lines to ensure the trainer/course deliverer is not the only expert.

II. Conclusion

The Ralpa and Goyurr programmes have extra ordinarily influenced the development of vocational aligned mindsets in the local Indigenous communities. In addition to the core of members, who have chosen a path of continuous employment, there are examples of envious 'outsiders' now returning to work after a period of involuntary or voluntary absence, and there are also other Yolngu, from more distant centres now voicing for an opportunity to join the scheme. A central theme of the Indigenous VET scheme is employment of strategies sensitively aligning cultural continuities and community development interests. In a relatively short time the Ralpa and Goyurr programmes have overcome the major barriers to Indigenous employment of low levels of English literacy, minimal work experience and locational disadvantage. Partnerships identifying jobs for building community projects is an innovative method for creating further vocational opportunities. Overall, this approach has advanced the development of community and individual confidence for vocational pathways and regional strategic growth.

To this point the paper has presented an optimistic perspective, but there is also a half glass empty matter for consideration. The Gove Peninsula has a potential market of some 8,000 people, one half being non Indigenous, and over time the growing Indigenous workforce delivered by the Ralpa and Goyurr programmes will be servicing this relatively static sized consumer group. Recognising a more extensive catchment will be advantageous the Gumatj Corporation has initiated negotiations with national corporations and Australian government departments to increase market potential including the acquisition of personnel with compatibility for industrial skills and work experience. Although the pilot Ralpa and Goyurr schemes are in a stage of infancy it does 'buy' time to overcome the chronic and enduring disadvantages experienced by Australian Indigenous people on the Gove Peninsula, who are developing their capacity to work in a context of intergenerational unemployment.

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