

Multiple benefits and knowledge systems of Indigenous land and sea management programs

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Northern Australia
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World class research to support sustainable development in northern Australia

This project aims to improve understanding of the socioeconomic benefits of Indigenous Land and Sea Management Programs (ILSMPs), with four related objectives. This policy note focuses on some of the community-level benefits. It is based on Addison et al. (2019) *The ability of community-based natural resource management to contribute to development as freedom, and the role of access*.¹

Can Indigenous Land and Sea Management Programs contribute to ‘development’ as it is perceived by Indigenous communities?

FINDINGS

- ▶ **FIRST**, within the context of community-based natural resource management, both the government and communities seek to progress their own version of ‘development’.
- ▶ **SECOND**, communities generally see development as ‘control, leadership, empowerment and independence’ (we refer to these attributes collectively as ‘freedom’). This view contrasts with government who generally has created a pre-defined list of development components, initiatives or ‘functionings’ for communities, such as activities to close the income or employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.
- ▶ **THIRD**, communities seek ‘freedom’ so, among other things, they can choose for themselves a particular combination of development initiatives.
- ▶ **FOURTH**, despite this potential disconnect between community and government aspirations, some communities have been able to use ILSMPs to help them overcome development constraints that would otherwise affect their realisation of development ‘freedom’ such as those related to property rights or a lack of capital.
- ▶ **FIFTH**, most communities stated that ILSMPs have contributed towards ‘control, leadership, empowerment and independence’.
- ▶ **SIXTH**, to help more communities move towards ‘freedom’ and thus maximise the benefits that can be generated by ILSMPs, ILSMPs could be more

Summary

Indigenous Land and Sea Management Programs can help overcome the potential disconnect between community and government aspirations for development by contributing towards community goals of control, leadership, empowerment and independence. ILSMPs can also contribute to development through overcoming institutional, capital, property and knowledge constraints that can limit development progress.

We suggest that community-based natural resource management programs such as Indigenous Land and Sea Management Programs should be co-designed with communities and not subject to pre-design, so that these programs can provide greater flexibility for communities and multiply development benefits.

strongly designed with communities (rather than for communities), be consistently funded and be open/flexible so that communities can use the funding in ways that best help them overcome constraints to achieve the development benefits that they are seeking.

METHOD

We aimed to explore:

- what constitutes ‘development’ for Indigenous communities and government within the context of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM)
- how CBNRM programs, such as ILSMPs, contribute to Indigenous communities’ ‘development’ aspirations
- how access constraints impact development benefits from ILSMPs.

We began by reviewing relevant theories and literatures, including those related to CBNRM, and development and access theories.

We then designed a research methodology exploring the contribution of ILSMPs to

‘development’ as it is understood by development theorists, ILSMP funding agencies (the government) and involved communities.

We also wished to understand the relationship between access (including institutional, capital, knowledge, etc.) constraints and the realisation of development benefits within an ILSMP context.

We took a qualitative case study approach, seeking insights at the community level with participants from five Indigenous partner groups – four in the West Kimberley and one in Queensland – and from the Australian Government. The methodological approach we took included:

1. The review of theory and relevant literatures.
2. Community-level workshops:
 - a. vision mapping
 - b. historical mapping
 - c. prompted, stated contributions of ILSMPs to the achievement of community-level visions.
4. Analysis of documents related to development conceptualisations and the potential role of ILSMPs, including:
 - e. community-level documents
 - f. government-level documents.

We then coded workshop and document analysis data into themes to assess the relative contribution of ILSMPs to development aspirations. We analysed them in light of pre-existing theories.

REFERENCE

1. Addison J, Stoeckl N, Larson S, Jarvis D, Bidan Aboriginal Corporation, Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Ewamian Aboriginal Corporation, Gooniyandi Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC, Yanunijarra Ngurrara Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC & Esparon M. 2019. The ability of community based natural resource management to contribute to development as freedom and the role of access. *World Development* 120: 91-104 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.04.004>



The qualitative case study approach involved reporting back to Indigenous partner groups, photo Celia Boxer.

Further information

Please see the [project page](#) on the Hub website. Outputs from the project can be found under the ‘Resources’ tab.

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Start-up factsheet

The challenge
Indigenous people are integral to the conservation of Australia's biodiversity and maintenance of cultural resources. Their ecological knowledge, passed on from one generation to another, has seen them successfully manage their land for tens of thousands of years. The importance of this knowledge is recognised throughout the world and is increasingly supported by investments in a variety of Indigenous Land Management Programs (ILMPs) which are mostly, but not exclusively, funded by government. Aside from generating ecological benefits, these programs generate many co-benefits – in social, cultural and economic benefits which accrue to Indigenous people, the government and the wider Australian community.

Our previous research highlighted that we have some understanding of the monetary value of some of these co-benefits, such as income earned by rangers, but have an incomplete understanding of other less tangible co-benefits such as those relating to culture. As a result, we do not have a holistic appreciation of the net benefit (or economic value) of ILMPs, to support investment funding decisions. Moreover, we have an incomplete understanding of the way in which co-benefits may accrue across different types of land management programs. Examining whether these programs generate more co-benefits than other programs can help guide investment decisions.

How will this research help?
Funding agencies such as governments, businesses and NGOs would like to know if their investments represent value for money. This project will provide quantified, comparable data about the co-benefits of different types of ILMPs, to bring us a full picture of information that will:

- Support continued and improved funding to support Indigenous people working on country.
- Better guide investments towards ILMPs that effectively deliver most benefits in different contexts.

Brian Loner, photo © Owen Semple



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