

Mia Mia Aboriginal Community Development

Fostering cultural security

Until recently, Aboriginal people have been subjected to mainly top-down development, which has proven damaging to communities. *Mia Mia Aboriginal Community Development* offers an alternative to such approaches, promoting cultural security in order to empower Aboriginal people to strengthen their own communities. It provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the theory and practice of community development from an Aboriginal perspective.

The authors take a multidisciplinary approach to the topics of Aboriginal community development, Aboriginal history, cultural security and community studies. This book includes chapters examining historical and contemporary Aboriginal conceptions of community development, and the effects of post-structuralism, postmodernism, globalisation and digital technology.

As well as comprehensive analysis of community development in Aboriginal communities, *Mia Mia* presents practical strategies and tools for improvement. Each chapter includes accessible and practical case studies and review exercises, encouraging active learning and constant reflection and deliberation.

A valuable resource for tertiary education students, and for anyone with an interest in strengthening Aboriginal communities, *Mia Mia* features contributions from some of Australia's most eminent Aboriginal scholars, Elders and Aboriginal community members alongside contributions from community development practitioners.

Cheryl Kickett-Tucker belongs to the Noongar people of the south-west region of Western Australia, and is a Wadjuk Noongar, Derbarlyung (belonging to the Swan River) Traditional Owner of the Perth bioregion. She also has close family and cultural affiliations with the Balladong and Yued people, and is married to a Wongi man from the North Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia. She is Executive Director of Pindi Pindi Ltd, Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Wellbeing, Western Australia, and Professor of Indigenous Research Leadership, Curtin University.

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Juli Coffin belongs to the Nyangumarta language group; she has lived most of her life in the Pilbara and Yamaji (Mid-west) region of Western Australia. Professor Coffin is Director at the Broome Campus of Notre Dame University, Western Australia.

Michael Wright is a Yuat Noongar man, from Western Australia. He is an Early Career Research Fellow at Curtin University, and he leads and co-leads both Aboriginal community mental health research and Aboriginal child health research projects in the Perth area.

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A note on terminology

The following terms are used interchangeably throughout this book: ‘Aboriginal’ (denoting the first inhabitants of the Australian mainland), the broader term ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ and ‘Indigenous’ (meaning ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’). A further term that appears is ‘indigenous’, in reference to the First Peoples of various countries around the world.

Please be aware that the text may contain variations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander terms and spellings; no disrespect is intended.

■ **Meaning of ‘Mia Mia’**

‘Mia Mia’ is a term used by the Noongar people of the south-west region of Western Australia. It literally means ‘home’. ‘Mia Mia’ was chosen as the title of this publication because for us Aboriginal people, home is the centre of our being. Home is where the heart is. Mia Mia guides us along our life’s journey. It keeps us humble and gives us purpose.

Other Aboriginal words appear in the titles of a number of chapters of this book; each term is explained at the start of the relevant chapter.

Foreword

A human rights framework for Aboriginal community development

Mick Gooda

Aboriginal-led community development provides the means to effect positive change in our communities and realise our right to live with dignity, equality, freedom and security of person.

In Australia there may never have been a more important time to present this collected work of some of our most experienced Aboriginal thought leaders, professionals and dedicated community workers as we seek the realisation of fundamental rights for our people.

I have known and worked with many of these tough leaders over the last 30 years and am in awe at the depth of their experience and knowledge. These are people making enormous contributions to the ‘quiet revolution’ in Aboriginal communities to which Dr Cheryl Kickett-Tucker has referred, and I salute their extraordinary contributions, the depth of their specialised knowledge and their generosity of spirit in sharing it here in this book.

This is a comprehensive work that takes as its starting point the strengths and talent in our communities. Importantly, its title uses the Noongar word for ‘home’, with the book exploring how this notion of home, including country, family and community, is fundamental to Aboriginal-led community development.

This collection provides practical examples, case studies and a wealth of information that can be used by practitioners, policy makers, researchers and anyone interested in using the extraordinary experiences captured here as a map for the way forward for Aboriginal communities. As Dr Kickett-Tucker said to me: ‘The work of these authors draws the threads of our lives together, like strings that are woven and intertwined into a big colourful tapestry. The book doesn’t cover everything; like a woven rug there are spaces, but it gives a sense of the many threads that make up home.’

As the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, my focus is the development of deeper, stronger relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community, between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and within these communities.

I am deeply convinced that, like many other areas, community development requires engagement and relationship building. Without a commitment to effective engagement and the development of meaningful, respectful relationships between Aboriginal communities, government and the private sector, we will continue to fall short of the positive, sustainable outcomes we are all seeking to achieve.

These relationships should be underpinned by human rights standards. In the case of community development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, these human rights are clearly articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development (the Declarations). The foundational principles of the Declarations can be used both to guide community development and as benchmarks against which to measure the effectiveness of actions.

The principles set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are:

- self-determination
- participation in decision making; free, prior and informed consent; and good faith respect for and protection of culture
- equality and non-discrimination.

In 1986 the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development, which provides a comprehensive framework for the policies and programs of all relevant actors at the global, regional, subregional and national levels. In Australia the focus of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been to protect our rights and freedoms when development occurs on our lands, water and resources. We are now awakening to the realisation that we, as the Indigenous peoples of Australia, have a right to development. We can look to the Declaration on the Right to Development as a standard for both government and business and as a set of guiding principles for our development initiatives. The right to development:

- integrates aspects of both human rights and development theory and practice
- encompasses all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural
- requires active, free and meaningful participation
- involves both national and international dimensions of State responsibilities, including in the creation of an enabling environment for development and favourable conditions for all human rights
- demands comprehensive and human-centred development policy, participatory development processes, social justice and equity

- embodies the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, accountability as well as international cooperation in an integrated manner
- implies the principles of self-determination and full sovereignty over natural wealth and resources
- facilitates a holistic approach to the issue of poverty by addressing its systemic and structural causes
- strengthens the basis for pro-poor growth with due attention to the rights of the most marginalized
- fosters friendly relations between states, international solidarity, cooperation and assistance in areas of concern to developing countries, including technology transfer, access to essential medicines, debt sustainability, development aid, international trade and policy space in decision-making (United Nations, Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'The Right to Development at a glance', http://www.un.org/en/events/righttodevelopment/pdf/rtd_at_a_glance.pdf).

Together the two Declarations provide us with internationally agreed and recognised standards that remind us that the purpose of development is for the benefit of the people.

Therefore, using these Declarations as both guides to and benchmarks for a human rights-based approach to Aboriginal-led community development provides a framework that seeks to empower Aboriginal people and communities to identify their priorities and needs for their own mob.

The collective and individual rights find a focus in the building of 'home' – both physical housing and culturally secure environments – and the resilience we need to feel at home as individuals.

I am totally confident that our communities have the knowledge, strength and resilience to make informed plans in order to live safe, secure and healthy lives.

The critical role that Aboriginal-led community development plays in the provision of safe and secure housing for our communities is undeniable. Historically, concepts and practices of community development have rarely attributed or valued the deep connection felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their lands and natural environment. When our people are actively involved and have a say about what our communities need, sustainable outcomes that last for generations are more likely to result.

Land, and our connection to it, is central to our way of knowing and being Indigenous peoples. Therefore, it is imperative that this deep connection form the basis of any new framework for Aboriginal community development. We are coming through a period of reasserting our rights over land and water, and with that comes new challenges to conceive of resource development that aligns with our values, and new opportunities to consider how we make and maintain home today.

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The focus of each chapter within this book provides a unique perspective on the ideals and practices that inform successful Aboriginal-led community development initiatives for our current conditions.

Taking a human rights-based approach to Aboriginal-led community development provides a foundation that empowers our mob to actively participate and make decisions about their own lives and wellbeing.

I believe this book makes an important and much-needed contribution, and it is my hope that policy makers, community development practitioners, the Aboriginal community and all layers of government can draw on the extensive body of work contained in this book and forge a new paradigm in Aboriginal-led community development.

Mick Gooda is a Royal Commissioner for the Royal Commission into the Child Protection and Youth Detention Systems of the Northern Territory, and former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission.

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Acknowledgements

Country is an integral part of being Aboriginal ... it is home and the essence of 'community'.

With respect for and on behalf of all past, present and future Elders, we acknowledge their power, passion and good spirit that allow us to be here on 'country'.

We honour our Ancestors, who have given each one of the Aboriginal authors of this book purpose and meaning for their journey. We have come together from all over Australia to share, learn, debate and negotiate the truths of our hearts so that we can remain steadfast for and in solidarity with the communities of the oldest living culture in the world.

We would like to acknowledge past, present and future Aboriginal scholars and leaders. Continue to radiate your good spirit. Be the beacon for all of us working in 'community' and shine your light for all to see.

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Importantly, we would like to acknowledge Noongar Wadjuk Elder Shirley Harris, who designed the cover of our book by depicting the strength of our people ... our community.

We dedicate this book to our greatest assets ... our people ... who hold the spirit of our communities always close to their hearts.

Professor Cheryl Kickett-Tucker

Chief Editor