

Regulating Responsibilities: Income Management, Community Engagement and Bureaucratic Learning at Mäpuru, North East Arnhem Land

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Abstract

The blanket implementation of income management in prescribed Indigenous areas under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and in the absence of community consultation or negotiation processes, was informed by a view of community engagement as preventing action and failing to deliver outcomes. However, the outcomes of income management documented by the authors at Mäpuru, a homeland centre in north east Arnhem Land, demonstrates policy failure as a result of poor policy design and objectives inappropriate to the local context. Outcomes included centralisation, reduced food security and the perpetuation of disengagement and marginalisation. This paper discusses the ramifications of the NTER approach to policy formulation and implementation, arguing that this approach robs policymakers of important opportunities for bureaucratic learning and perpetuates a cycle of policy experimentation and failure. Community engagement, local partnerships and appropriate communications methods may lead to more appropriate and effective policy responses to issues in Indigenous communities.

Introduction

The inherently political process of public policy development and implementation in Indigenous affairs was exemplified by the Australian Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), a unilateral attempt to address perceived inappropriate behavioural norms in Northern Territory Indigenous communities. Following a series of reports on Indigenous child abuse and a subsequent inquiry culminating in the *Little Children are Sacred Report* (Anderson & Wild, 2007), in June 2007 the Australian Government announced this dramatic attempt to reconstitute social norms in Northern

Territory Indigenous communities, without consulting Indigenous communities or leaders and bypassing established processes. Emergency measures included alcohol and pornography bans, compulsory land leases, the instalment of Government Business Managers in communities, child health checks, the abolition of customary law provisions from sentencing and welfare reform measures. A key measure was income management, involving the compulsory administration of 50% of people's social security payments by Centrelink¹ for expenditure

¹ Centrelink is an agency of the Australian Government which is responsible for administering social security payments (Centrelink 2009).

on Government-defined priority needs, and the prohibition of the use of these funds to purchase alcohol, tobacco, and pornography or for gambling (Brough, 2007a).

It was argued that engaging in consultation and negotiation processes would prevent or delay action and create bureaucratic barriers to the adoption of strong measures by NTER proponents (Mundine in Karvelas, 2008; Pearson, 2009). Former Prime Minister John Howard justified the decision not to consult with communities: 'I don't think you can respect power structures in these communities when clearly those structures have failed to deliver the right outcome' (Jones, 2007).

It was also suggested that the unexpected nature and speed of implementation would deliver a necessary rearrangement of affairs in Indigenous communities (Sutton, 2009; Toohey, 2008). The NTER and in particular the income management component emerged from discourses which had taken place over the past decade on inappropriate behaviours and unfulfilled responsibilities in Indigenous communities (Jarrett, 2009; Johns, 2008; Langton, 2008, 2009; Nowra, 2007; Pearson, 2000, 2007; Sutton, 2001). These discourses fuelled further debate about the failure of Indigenous self-determination (Altman, 2004; Behrendt, 2007; Kowal, 2008; Sutton, 2001, 2009; Wooten, 2004) and led to a questioning of Indigenous customary practices and ways of being (Nowra, 2007; Sutton, 2001, 2009), thus providing the necessary context for the emergence of new policy agendas targeting individual responsibilities (Manne, 2007; Pearson, 2000; Sanders, 2009; Wooten, 2004). The NTER and income management provided an unprecedented response to perceived inappropriate norms of behaviour in Indigenous communities, particularly to Indigenous people's expenditure decisions and caring responsibilities (Brough, 2007b; Howard, 2007). Problematic behaviour, seen to pervade Indigenous communities (Langton, 2008, 2009; Sutton 2001, 2009; Toohey, 2008), gave rise to a policy response which bypassed local solutions and the targeting of individuals.

Debates about past policy failures have led to a shift towards functional questions of 'what works' and a greater emphasis on evidence-based programs by government (Dillon & Westbury, 2007; Neill, 2002; Pearson, 2009; Sanders, 2009). Somewhat paradoxically, little evidence existed at the time of implementation of the likely outcomes of new policy approaches targeting individual behavioural norms such as income management (Sanders, 2009). Like Ferguson's anti-politics machine (1994), the rendering of political issues of poverty and marginalization into technical problems to be solved using an evidence-based approach obscures the fragmented, incomplete and political nature of knowledge that informs public policy development. Many different kinds of knowledge inform the policy development process, of which research findings form only one component (Bridgman & Davis, 2004). Academic research alone does not always provide complete or comprehensive answers to social policy questions due to the unpredictable nature of human behaviour and the importance of contextual factors (Pawson, 2006).

In this context, we discuss bureaucratic learning, or the production of bureaucratic knowledge about the scope and nature of problems, their causes and the implications of potential solutions in Indigenous communities. Bureaucratic learning, an inherently political process, is influenced by ongoing interactions between the state and communities through service delivery, in addition to a variety of other non-local factors (Lea 2008). This paper analyses the ramifications of the NTER approach to policy formulation and implementation for bureaucratic learning. Using a case study of the impacts of income management, a key aspect of the NTER, in the homeland² community of Mäpuru in north east Arnhem Land, we demonstrate how this approach has failed, resulting in heightened food insecurity and contributing to increased disengagement and

² Homelands, also known as outstations, are small, decentralised Indigenous communities located outside major centres. Homelands usually consist of a single family group, with a population of around 50-100 and are often in very remote areas.

marginalisation of community members. We argue that the unilateral NTER approach perpetuates a cycle of policy experimentation and failure. Community engagement processes and local partnerships provide a key forum for bureaucratic learning and are likely to offer a more appropriate and effective method for addressing issues in Indigenous communities.

Contextualising Income Management

The objectives of income management are to promote socially responsible behaviour, ensure that priority needs of families are met, and reduce the amount of cash in communities available for excluded items (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare AIHW, 2009). Income management operates through the licensing of food outlets to accept managed income (FaHCSIA, 2008b). Income management was initially applied by the Federal Liberal/National Coalition Government in a blanket manner to prescribed Northern Territory areas, consisting of all Indigenous land held under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976* (Cth) and town camps, for a period of five years, through the suspension of anti-racial discrimination legislation (Department of Parliamentary Services, 2007)³. Subsequent Federal Labor Governments have continued and extended the operation of income management in the Northern Territory to recipients of most forms of social security payments (FaHCSIA, 2012), reclassifying income management as a 'special measure' under racial discrimination legislation (Australian Government, 2009). Exemptions are now possible in certain circumstances, based on criteria such as participation

3 'Prescribed areas' represent all Indigenous land held under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) and home to over 70% of the Indigenous population of the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board 2008). Prescribed areas have only been subject to limited NTER measures, such as income management and alcohol and pornography bans. 'Prescribed communities' are 73 Northern Territory Indigenous communities subject to more intensive intervention, including compulsory leases and the direct oversight of Government Business Managers. Prescribed communities have also had access to new funding made available under the NTER for improved infrastructure and service delivery (Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board 2008). Homelands, including Mäpuru, have generally been included in prescribed areas but not prescribed communities.

in paid employment or study and demonstration of responsible parenting (FaHCSIA, 2010), and there is no sunset clause for these changes. These changes were based on community consultations conducted in 2009 (Macklin 2009a).

However, the consultation processes used to inform income management reforms have drawn some criticism. Participants in the consultation process attended community and regional meetings and were asked to discuss a limited range of future options for income management (FaHCSIA, 2009a). Observers at meetings have pointed to a number of irregularities such as mediator bias, inadequate or misleading information and failure to provide professional interpreters in many instances (Central Land Council, 2010; Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia, 2009; Nicholson, Behrendt, Vivian, Watson, & Harris, 2009).

Additionally, the NTER occurred in the context of changing governance arrangements to infrastructure and essential services provision for homelands which resulted in significant budget cuts as both Federal and NT Governments have sought to channel funding into larger communities (Australian Government & Northern Territory Government, 2007). Reforms to the organisation of local government in the NT, a key mechanism for service delivery to remote areas, occurred concurrently with the implementation of the NTER. These changes interacted with the implementation of income management in homelands and, most likely, influenced the way income management was perceived by homeland residents, as will become clear in the following section.

Outcomes of Income Management: A Brief Review of the Literature

A small amount of research into the outcomes of income management exists, with mixed findings. Much of this comprises government conducted or commissioned evaluations, which generally present more positive findings overall

(AIHW, 2009; Bowchung, 2011; FaHCSIA, 2008a, 2008c, 2009c, 2011), although these may reflect general government bias and a need to demonstrate that income management comprises a form of positive discrimination to satisfy racial discrimination legislation. Analysis of the impact of income management on sales in 10 stores in prescribed communities has also been undertaken by Brimblecombe and colleagues (2010) and the Equality Rights Alliance (2011) has undertaken qualitative research of the experiences of income management of Indigenous and migrant women in urban areas of the Northern Territory.

Government conducted or commissioned reports have found that the availability of food at community stores has improved (FaHCSIA, 2008a, 2011) and expenditure on food has increased (AIHW, 2009; Bowchung, 2011; FaHCSIA, 2008a, 2009c), although small reductions in gambling and expenditure on alcohol and no change in cigarette sales were also reported (Bowchung, 2011; FaHCSIA, 2009c). However, Brimblecombe and colleagues (2010) found that income management had no impact on total store sales or on tobacco sales and attribute increases in store sales to government stimulus payments, while most women surveyed by the Equality Rights Alliance (2011) reported little impact on the goods purchased. Many studies reported increases in food prices (Bowchung, 2011; FaHCSIA, 2008a, 2008c, 2009c, 2011), potentially limiting peoples' ability to take advantage of the greater availability of food. Possible causes of this are attributed to anti-competitive outcomes of the store licensing regime and increased fuel prices (FaHCSIA, 2011). A small number of women surveyed by the Equality Rights Alliance (2011) also reported benefits in saving and budgeting and reduced incidence of 'humberging'.

Difficulties in using managed income for travel and to fulfill customary obligations have been reported (FaHCSIA 2008a, FaHCSIA 2011), in addition to a reduced ability to travel to and reside in homelands (FaHCSIA 2008a). Income management has been associated with perceptions of disempowerment

and lack of control over finances (FaHCSIA, 2008a, 2011) and a loss of dignity and respect (Equality Rights Alliance, 2011). Women surveyed by the Equality Rights Alliance (2011) also reported a rise in petty crime in order to obtain cash.

Outcomes of Income Management at Mäpuru

Methodology

Mäpuru is a Yolŋu homeland in north east Arnhem Land, located on Wobulkarra land and consisting of people from the Guyamirrili, Ritharrŋu, Ganalbŋu and Djambarrpuyŋu nations. It was established in the late 1960s by families that aspired to remain on their custodial estates while trading with the nearby Elcho Island mission. The closest town, Galiwin'ku, on Elcho Island, can be reached by chartered aircraft, or private boat and unsealed roads in the dry season.

Mäpuru Nŋatha, the only commercial food outlet at Mäpuru, was established by residents in order to reduce their dependence on Galiwin'ku for food and to lower associated travel costs (Arnhem Weavers, 2009). In 2004, the store operators won the *Heart Foundation's National Award for Small Rural and Remote Community Projects* for their approach to encouraging healthy diets through the range of items stocked (Heart Foundation, 2004). However, throughout the study period (September 2008 – September 2009), the store operators had two applications to license the store for income management rejected. The reasons provided for these decisions included inadequate financial management and governance processes, a lack of meat, fruit and vegetables stocked, poor understanding of income management amongst store management and the risk of 'humberg'⁴ in the context of a small family business (FaHCSIA, 2009b). This decision was later overturned through Ministerial intervention and the store became

⁴ 'Humberg' and 'humberging' refer to the exploitation of Indigenous peoples' customary responsibilities to share food and money with certain family members by their kin.

licensed for income management in December 2009 (FaHCSIA, 2009b).

Although income management remains a highly controversial issue, there is a general dearth of research independent of government into its outcomes in communities. The aims of this study were to investigate the lived experiences of income management on homelands using a qualitative case study approach, following requests from Mäpuru community members to have their experiences of income management documented (Malñumba, Gitjpulu, & Gulumindiwuy, 2009; Nñuluwidi, 2009). The research undertaken contributed towards the Honours thesis of Stef Puszka. The case study site of Mäpuru was selected as an instance of a 'unique opportunity' to explore income management (Denscombe, 2007), where residents had experienced both personal income management and store licensing and expressed desires to have their experiences publicised. John Greatorex has established relationships with people at Mäpuru over several decades through his work as an educator and Coordinator of the Yolñu Studies program at Charles Darwin University.

Research methods consisted of the analysis of public statements produced by community members to address their concerns to Government between September 2008 and September 2009, during the early implementation stages of income management at Mäpuru. This included submissions to a Northern Territory Government review of service delivery to homelands which also addressed issues associated with income management (Nñuluwidi, 2008). All statements were publicly accessible through a website (www.culturalsurvival.org.au). Residents provided permission for the use of statements for this analysis.

Five statements from five Mäpuru residents of approximately 15–25 minutes length were included in the original analysis (two individual statements and one group statement), comprising two men and three women. One statement included in the original analysis was subsequently removed following

the death of the author, according to the wishes of his family. As statements were publicly available and represented attempts to publicise matters at Mäpuru, no attempt has been made to conceal the identities of the other remaining authors.

Statements were made in audio and visual format in Djambarrpuyñu, one of the languages spoken at Mäpuru, transcribed from video and audio files by Stef Puszka, who undertook a Graduate Certificate in Yolñu Studies concurrently, and translated into English by John Greatorex, a qualified interpreter. Statements were analysed using an inductive process (Gillham, 2000) and where possible they were validated through personal communications, government documents and media reports. Stef Puszka conducted primary content analysis and developed a thematic coding framework to categorise themes using Microsoft Excel. Initial codes, representing groups of related concepts found throughout the data, were first tested on a representative selection of data and discussed by all authors before finalisation and application to all data. The dominant themes to emerge from this process were: access to income and coping with change, food insecurity, incongruence with local aspirations and disengagement and disempowerment.

Access to Income and Coping with Change

Mäpuru residents demonstrated broad compliance with income management requirements, reporting the expenditure of managed income on food, for the benefit of themselves and their children, in accordance with specified 'priority needs' and 'excluded items' (Malñumba et al., 2009; Nñuluwidi, 2008). No change in alcohol consumption was reported, although residents described a reduced ability to purchase cigarettes (Malñumba et al., 2009).

However, income management brought new complexities to the task of purchasing food. Residents described purchasing items with their three different income sources (managed Centrelink income, non-managed Centrelink income and

private income), and the need to call Centrelink to check their account balances prior to shopping trips, as a cumbersome process, particularly in the early implementation period (Maljumba et al., 2009). Additional complexity resulted from the options provided to residents of diverting managed income to either the BasicsCard, a debit card distributed by Centrelink, store cards which could only be spent at specific stores in specific locations, or both the BasicsCard and store cards (Njuluwidi, 2009).

Residents also experienced difficulties in using and accessing managed income. Problems were reported with the use of managed funds to pay for plane charter services to Galiwin'ku for shopping (Maljumba et al., 2009), despite the inclusion of transport costs for the purpose of procuring food as a 'priority need' (Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Act 2007 (Cth)). People usually paid for transport by cash, because, according to Maljumba (2009) 'it's too hard to use the cards'. Some residents reported that their income had not been transferred to their BasicsCards or store cards, despite numerous requests made to Centrelink, and that they had subsequently become reliant on family members for food. According to Njuluwidi, (2008), 'there are stops, we don't know how to access that income management money'. Communication difficulties with Centrelink officers and a poor use of interpreting services were also noted (Njuluwidi, 2009) and are likely to have been a factor for residents attempting to access their income and in coping with the NTER-wrought changes. Residents continued to report these issues in September 2009, 18 months after the introduction of income management to the area, indicating more systemic problems.

Food Insecurity

Mäpuru was subject to significant instability as a result of the rejection of residents' store licensing applications. Food security declined as residents became unable to purchase essential items at Mäpuru with managed income. More frequent

shopping trips to Galiwin'ku and other regional centres, usually via chartered flights, resulted in greater travel costs and reduced disposable income (Maljumba et al., 2009; Njuluwidi, 2008). Some older residents relocated to Galiwin'ku in order to improve their access to commercial food supplies and avoid frequent travel in light aircraft (Njuluwidi, 2008). Others had become stranded at Galiwin'ku when they had insufficient funds to return or were unable to secure return transportation (Maljumba et al., 2009). This phenomenon whereby the population of a homeland centre, Mäpuru, has become reduced as the population of a larger regional centre, Galiwin'ku, has expanded is, in reality, a form of centralisation.

The income management store licensing regime resulted in anti-competitive outcomes in the region. Mäpuru residents discussed their lack of choices in stores where managed income could be spent and the subsequent power of licensed operators. According to Maljumba (2009), 'They can become rich there, rich from that Galiwin'ku shop and that Gapuwiyak shop. Yes, because there is lots and lots of money there, because [all] the money from the BasicsCard is spent [there] on food.' Increased prices and profit margins at licensed stores have been reported since the introduction of income management (Central Land Council, 2008; FaHCSIA, 2008a, 2008c).

The Mäpuru Njatha store continued to operate at reduced capacity as a result of declining sales revenue (Njuluwidi, 2009). According to Njuluwidi (2009), 'It's just going okay, we just order enough food to keep going'. However, he persisted in operating the store: 'I'm going to keep ordering food for the shop. . . . If you can't approve us to use the food card, I'll just keep on ordering food, so we can buy food here' (Njuluwidi, 2008). Outback Stores, a Government-owned business established to assist Indigenous community stores, was unwilling to become involved in store management, despite assuming the management contracts of other stores which have not met licensing criteria (FaHCSIA, 2008b).

Incongruence with Local Aspirations

Self-development through the ownership and management of businesses formed an important component of Māpuru residents' identities and aspirations for autonomy. Achieving self-sufficiency and greater independence were stressed by residents. The connection between local development and the trading their forebears had undertaken previously with Macassans and later with missionaries was also commented on. It was commented by Gitjpulu (Maljumba et al., 2009), 'It would be very good [if] we were able to help ourselves'. Businesses contributed to self-sufficiency both through the generation of an income independent of Government and by providing an additional food supply (Maljumba et al., 2009; Njuluwidi, 2009).

It was evident that the outcomes of income management threatened aspirations for self-sufficiency through local businesses. Centralisation as a result of income management was removing residents away from their economic base and causing a loss of political and economic independence (Maljumba et al., 2009; Njuluwidi, 2008). According to Maljumba (Maljumba et al., 2009), 'Galiwin'ku is not a good place, maybe it's good for other people, but for us it's no good'. Njuluwidi (2008) described similar sentiments: 'That place [Galiwin'ku] is not ours, not our country'. A number of factors at Galiwin'ku further threatened residents' livelihoods and aspirations, including social instability and conflict (Maljumba et al., 2009; Njuluwidi, 2008, 2009). As described by Njuluwidi (2008): 'Galiwin'ku is a mixed community. People are fighting and there are lots of problems'. In addition to obstructing residents' aspirations, the outcomes of income management evidently threatened identities amongst Māpuru people as successful, autonomous homeland residents living on their nation estates.

The policy objectives of income management bore little resemblance to the issues and aspirations discussed by Māpuru residents. Although residents

expressed clear desires for development and greater self-sufficiency, the blanket objectives of income management and the responsibilities agenda underlying it contrasted strongly with the local specificity of residents' aspirations and residents' emphasis on community control over local projects. Income management imposed a heavy regulatory burden which the store managers were unable to comply with and which sought to restrict rather than support residents' aspirations and initiatives. Local knowledge, structures, values and resources were ultimately ignored by policymakers in favour of compliance with a proscriptive business model.

Disengagement and Disempowerment

The NTER approach to policy development and implementation culminated in negligible understandings of income management at Māpuru. Confusion over the policy objectives of income management was expressed. Although there was an awareness that managed income was 'for the kids' (Maljumba et al., 2009; Njuluwidi 2009), a lack of understanding of the objectives and justifications for income management were emphasised by most residents (Maljumba et al. 2009; Njuluwidi 2009). According to Maljumba (Maljumba et al. 2009), 'We Yolŋu think we've got lots of money in income management but Yolŋu don't know the meaning of it, what it's there for'. Similarly, Njuluwidi (2009) described residents' confusion: 'We don't know that system, how it's working, what it means when there's money in income management'.

Māpuru residents described their concerns about income management as matters of process and power. The absence of community consultation and negotiation processes prior to the introduction of income management was perceived as disrespectful to residents, in addition to hampering the effectiveness of the policy. An inability to experience income management in their ŋayaŋu or inner feelings and emotions, to adapt to it and work within it as a result of being unable to understand it was described by Njuluwidi (2009), demonstrating a perspective about the need for policies and their

objectives to be properly understood in order to be embodied by people. A number of residents demanded formal negotiations about the future of income management (Maljumba et al. 2009; Njuluwidi, 2009). Njuluwidi (2009) similarly demonstrated a perception of a failure to follow proper processes: '[The Government] doesn't go through the right channels'.

The lack of external coherence of Government policies was viewed as an intentional Government strategy for maintaining power over people at Mäpuru. Residents described the continually changing nature of Government policies and the difficulties they experienced in staying informed about policies impacting on them. Njuluwidi (2009) commented, 'We don't understand the first system, we don't understand the second system and we don't understand the third system. It's all tangled up'. This contrasted sharply with perceptions of Yolŋu laws and systems as being concrete (Njuluwidi, 2009). Government was perceived as establishing and enforcing regulations according to ambiguous objectives, impeding the ability of people at Mäpuru to hold it to account. A lack of transparency in Government intentions was described: 'If things flowed easily, you could see how it worked' (Njuluwidi, 2009).

People at Mäpuru situated income management within continually changing policies and previous experiences of external control. These experiences were demonstrated by centralisation during the assimilation era, support for the homelands movement under the self-determination framework and more recent changes to funding arrangements for homelands (Njuluwidi, 2008, 2009). As was commented by Njuluwidi (2008), 'We already moved from other places and came back'.

For Mäpuru residents, income management was experienced as a threat to their autonomy (Njuluwidi 2008). The lack of choices and uncertainty produced by income management were deeply disempowering for residents (Njuluwidi, 2008). Feelings of becoming disoriented and dissociated

from power over their own lives by constantly oscillating Government positions and objectives were described, particularly in Government support for homelands. According to Njuluwidi (2008), 'So now the Government asks us to move, pulling us like [in] a net . . .'

As a result of the food insecurity it produced, income management was reconfigured as a process of centralisation and embedded in wider changes occurring to funding arrangements for homelands (Maljumba et al., 2009). It was perceived as a Government 'trick' ultimately intended to divorce people from ancestral estates, homelands and livelihoods through the extreme threats and constraints imposed through centralisation (Njuluwidi, 2008). According to Njuluwidi (2008), 'Through that food card there are lots of tricks. The Government has lots of good tricks. The Government says: you want food? Your food can come through the food card. And go and shop at Galiwin'ku.' Maljumba (Maljumba et al., 2009) described similar sentiments, also demonstrating a perception of income management as providing an additional income source which would further entrench unwanted dependencies which would produce future obligations: 'What is the truth of that income management? The Government says here's your money in income management and later they'll take our land. Maybe that's the reason they give us money for income management'.

It is evident that income management heightened feelings of alienation and perceptions of powerlessness already present to some extent at Mäpuru. Although the threat to food security presented by the failure to obtain a store license at Mäpuru has since been resolved, the manner in which income management threatened future livelihoods and contributed to uncertainty has further fuelled ongoing distrust of Government amongst residents and is unlikely to have promoted residents' self-esteem and community capacity-building efforts. The development of a productive relationship between the community and Government was significantly diminished

by income management and is likely to require significant and sustained engagement in future premised on genuine respect by governments for the social capital of remote community residents.

Improving Outcomes Through Consultation and Negotiation Processes

Other research into the outcomes of income management supports our general findings of a number of unintended consequences, including possible anti-competitive outcomes (FaHCSIA, 2011), difficulties using managed income to travel and fulfil customary or societal roles (FaHCSIA, 2008a; FaHCSIA, 2011) and the centralization of homeland residents into larger communities (FaHCSIA, 2008a). To these issues, our research contributes a further in-depth qualitative account of the cumbersome nature of income management which, in some instances, prevented people from accessing managed funds and substantiates suggestions that income management resulted in perceptions of powerlessness and a lack of control over money in communities (Equality Rights Alliance, 2011; FaHCSIA, 2011).

As Brimblecombe and colleagues (2010) and the Equality Rights Alliance (2011) found, Mäpuru residents did not report significant changes to their previous expenditure habits, as Mäpuru is a dry community, although residents did note that income management made the purchase of cigarettes more difficult. Our research conflicts with the findings of government-conducted research suggesting that income management resulted in increased availability of food (FaHCSIA, 2011); however, the government findings appear to be based only on data from licensed stores.

The failure of the interventionist policy approach at Mäpuru was underlined by disengagement between policymakers and residents. The blanket application of income management demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the general character of individual communities and specific local issues amongst policymakers, and culminated

in a number of significant unintended negative outcomes. The introduction of policies which necessitate significant lifestyle changes amongst target populations requires policymakers to inform themselves about local issues and potential ramifications of policy proposals. As commented by Njuluwidi (2009): 'We don't understand what's going on, what [income management] means, we didn't talk together'. Engaging in consultation processes may benefit both policymakers and communities through the development of better targeted solutions.

However, in order to reap mutually beneficial rewards, consultations must be based on a genuinely collaborative approach. When policymakers and communities maintain separate agendas and consultations are merely designed to legitimise Government positions, they are unlikely to be effective (Bohill & Douglas, 2000; Carter, 2010; Kennedy, 2009; Nicholson et al., 2009). Consultation processes in which communities are merely asked to choose from a limited range of options, and which are conducted for political or legal purposes, as has been suggested of the NTER Future Directions consultations (Behrendt, 2008; Nicholson et al., 2009), are unlikely to achieve these ends and may fuel further mistrust of Government. 'Consultation fatigue' through continual policy experimentation must also be avoided (Carter, 2010).

Consultation processes provide an important forum for bureaucratic learning. The development of more effective policies and programs through prior consultation processes has been well documented in the Australian Indigenous context (Hunter, 2007; Marika, Yunupingu, Y., Marika-Mununggiritj, 2009; r'Hart 2008). Engaging in genuine consultation processes may also bring the costly practice of policy experimentation as identified by Mäpuru residents to an end, and result in more concrete, lasting solutions.

The absence of an evidence base to support income management highlighted the need for prior

consultation and negotiation with communities. Despite a recent emphasis on evidence-based policy, frequent experimentation with new and untried ideas has meant that policymakers often lack information about the likely outcomes of policy proposals targeting Indigenous communities (Sanders, 2009). In the context of a lack of evidence to support new proposals, a failure to consult with communities is likely to privilege other, non-local perspectives. Public discourses of 'dysfunctionality', passivity and inappropriate behavioural norms compromise genuine consultation and overlook the local specificity of issues in Indigenous communities.

Engaging in genuine community consultation processes provides a means for improving the local knowledge of policymakers and overcoming their disconnection with communities. In particular, policymakers often lack detailed local knowledge (Lea, 2008). Engaging with communities through prior consultation processes is likely to provide policymakers with the type of localised, situational knowledge which they lack and may minimise subsequent operational issues.

Poor levels of understanding of income management among people at Mäpuru also underlined a need for greater engagement by Government. Community consultation processes are likely to lead to a better understanding of policies among intended targets, in addition to creating a sense of 'ownership'. Policies such as income management which aim to create behavioural change require effective local partnerships between Government and communities (Hunter, 2007; Webb, 2008).

This is particularly salient in remote communities such as homelands, where Governments lack the capacity to enforce coercive measures (Dillon & Westbury, 2007). For example, at Mäpuru, it took policymakers over two years to address food security issues arising from income management, despite a concerted campaign to have the store licensed by supporters of the community. The lack of Government capacity was further compounded by the unwillingness of

Outback Stores, an Australian Government company, to provide assistance or advice to the store operators.

Reducing perceptions of powerlessness and uncertainty are essential for building local capacities and self-sufficiency. To achieve the stated aim of 'resetting the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' (Macklin, 2009b), a genuine undertaking to halt policies which entrench disengagement, and begin empowering communities through genuine, sustained community engagement processes, is required.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study. This research consisted only of a single case study, and therefore may not be representative of other experiences of income management at other homeland communities. However, a case study methodology, providing a contextualized, in-depth account of local social relationships and processes (Denscombe, 2007; Gillham 2000), provides an appropriate framework for documenting programs of social and economic change, such as income management. It has been reported that Outback Stores have refused to provide services to other homelands-based stores in prescribed areas (Laynhapuy Homelands Association, 2007), while store licensing criteria stipulating the residence of a single family as a risk factor for 'humbug' appears likely to impact on other stores in homelands in similar ways. Although only five statements were included in this analysis, this sample included land owners, other community leaders and store managers. The sample also included a balanced representation of the genders (three women and two men) and different generations (three older or middle aged people, two younger adults).

Conclusions

The failure of income management at Mäpuru demonstrated a significant lack of engagement between policymakers and the community. Through inappropriate objectives and poor policy

design, the attempt to regulate responsibilities through constraining available choices ultimately resulted in the constraining of residents' abilities to fulfil them. The failure to improve food security and the serious unintended outcome of centralisation were a significant setback for the community's sustainability and a costly exercise in policy experimentation for the Australian Government. In addition, the resultant perpetuation of disengagement and marginalisation of residents may set back the actualisation of residents' aspirations for self-sufficiency and self-management and thus impede the success of future policies for Indigenous advancement at Mäpuru. Paradoxically, perspectives of consultation and negotiation processes as preventing action underlying the NTER have resulted in uninformed and poorly targeted policies.

Recent preferences for evidence-based policy have been underlined by a shift away from local, consultative approaches and have resulted in generic solutions to diverse circumstances. The blanket implementation of income management throughout Northern Territory Indigenous communities emerged from public discourses of inappropriate behaviour and unfulfilled responsibilities, rather than demonstrated outcomes or local knowledge, and denied policymakers important opportunities for bureaucratic learning. The application of the 'responsibilities agenda' to Mäpuru did not resonate with local concerns and was a key factor in the serious negative outcomes that eventuated. The responsibilities of policymakers to communities are conspicuously absent from these discourses, and were highlighted by the significant period of time taken to address unintended outcomes of income management at Mäpuru. As our research has shown, the dichotomisation of policy responses as either outcome-driven or consultative represents a false and damaging dualism.

While income management appears likely to continue at the time of writing, the lack of Government capacity to appropriately implement and enforce measures such as income

management in homelands and local desires for greater self-sufficiency has underlined the need for a partnership-based collaborative approach between Governments and communities in future policy development and implementation. Local approaches which address local issues in a targeted manner are required. While it is not our intention to provide a prescriptive method for undertaking consultation processes, Governments need to acknowledge and work within local governance structures in the development and implementation of new policies and programs, and in particular, work with local land owners, elders and organisations. Our research has also outlined the importance of using appropriate communications methods which enable local people to become fully informed about proposals and choices, which may include the engagement of both professional interpreters and bicultural consultants.

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