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**Implementation Review of Shared  
Responsibility Agreements: *Don't let's lose  
another good idea***

*Report for  
Department of Families, Community Services and  
Indigenous Affairs*

**Morgan Disney & Associates Pty Ltd**

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## Acknowledgements

The review team was a partnership between Morgan Disney & Associates, Tracey Whetnall, Benny Hodges, Sharon Payne, and Courage Partners Pty Ltd.

This review occurred within a tight timeframe and in a period when the Indigenous communities and Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) we visited were managing significant issues and had recently been involved in other reviews including the ICC Evaluation. Towards the end of this SRA Implementation review the events surrounding the release of the report - *Little Children Are Sacred* - and the national emergency response that followed, impacted on our ability to further test some issues with some key stakeholders. To the best of our ability we have reflected the views and opinions of both government and community stakeholders interviewed during the fieldwork for this review.

We have not identified specific communities visited nor cited any individual. We have respected the confidences of all of the stakeholders and generalised the findings as much as possible, in accordance with good practice research.

At all times we were welcomed and given the support we needed to be able to complete this task. ICC staff facilitated access to files, communities and other agency staff. The communities we visited welcomed the opportunity to contribute and were very open and frank in their feedback. The review team wishes to acknowledge this support and to thank everyone with whom we worked from both governments and communities.

## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>7</b>
Brief Background	8
The conceptual framework of SRAs	8
The practice of SRA development	9
Support for the development process	9
Coordinating government activity and funding - the role of ICCs and other government agencies	10
Building partnerships with communities	11
Meeting commitments	11
Behaviour change	12
Sustainability – of the approach and of SRA outcomes	12
Successful SRAs - lessons learnt	13
Future options	14
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2. Methodology</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>3. Conceptual framework</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Overview of the history and context of SRAs	19
A brief background on SRAs	19
Support at the most senior level	20
The change environment	21
3.2 The conceptual framework of SRAs in the first 2 years - 2003-05	22
Purpose and objectives and how they evolved	22
What was government trying to address?	23
The link between SRAs and Regional Partnership Agreements	24
New ways of working	24
Engaging with the mainstream	25
Partnerships and community governance	25
Issues of scope	25
Focus on change	26

Investment	27
Development processes	28
The leadership role of ICCs	28
3.3 Changes to the framework since 2005	29
More recent developments	31
3.4 Tools, information and resources	31
How ICCs were supported	32
Brief Summary	33
<b>4. The practical application of the framework in SRA implementation</b>	<b>34</b>
4.1 Intention and practice	35
Implementation of the purpose of SRAs	35
Funding as a core implementation issue	36
Single issue and comprehensive SRAs	36
Implementation of the intended scope of SRAs	37
The implementation strategies	38
4.2 Understanding of the methods used for developing SRAs	39
Support from Secretaries	40
Allowing time for SRAs to evolve	40
Tools and resources	40
Identification of potential SRAs and community priorities	41
Flexibility, responsiveness and consistency	42
Progress in delivery	43
Comprehensive SRAs	43
Brief summary	45
4.3 The concept of 'shared responsibility'	45
Shared responsibility in government	45
Shared responsibility with communities	47
Shared responsibility indicators	49
4.4 Forms of partnership	51
The partners	51
Partner interaction	53
The role of the Australian Government	54
4.5 The role of Australian Government officers in ICCs	55
Planning and research tools, information and training resources	56
<b>5. Funding and resources</b>	<b>57</b>
Funding across levels of government	58
Funding mechanisms	59
The quest for a single funding agreement	60
ICC delegations	60
Sustainability and funding	61

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In-kind contributions	61
<b>6. Lessons learnt - what's working and what could be done better</b>	<b>63</b>
Lessons identified by ICC Managers and staff	63
Lessons from the individual reviews	65
Further lessons identified by other respondents and the review team	65
The concept and role of a lead agency	66
Barriers, challenges and areas for improvement	67
Engaging the community	69
Achievements and difficulties	69
Conclusion	71
<b>7. Future options</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>8. References and websites</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Attachment 1: Information provided to respondents about the interviews</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Attachment 2: A detailed case study</b>	<b>79</b>

## Acronyms

ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DCITA	Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DEW	Department of Environment and Water Resources
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DOTARS	Department of Transport and Regional Services
FaCSIA	Department of Families, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs
GMS	Grants Management System
ICC	Indigenous Coordination Centre
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OIPC	Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
ORAC	Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations
RPA	Regional Partnership Agreement
SRA	Shared Responsibility Agreement
SRAIAP	Shared Responsibility Agreement Implementation Assistance Program
STO	State and Territory Office

## Executive Summary

This implementation review of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) was undertaken over 3 months between May and July 2007 by Morgan Disney & Associates for the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). The purpose of the review was to address the core question: *Are SRAs being implemented as intended?*

The review was framed by a set of questions around five key areas of investigation:

- SRA Conceptual Framework: What's the theory?
- The Practical Application: What's the Practice?
- Lessons Learnt: What have we learnt thus far?
- Funding and Resources – how have these been developed/used?
- Future Options – how to do better?

The review utilised a qualitative methodology and included secondary analysis of individual reviews of 80 SRAs conducted by individual consultants during 2006; site visits to 10 communities across the Northern Territory (NT), Queensland (Qld) and New South Wales (NSW); and engagement with three ICCs - Darwin, Coffs Harbour and Cairns. In total more than 90 SRAs were examined in some detail and approximately 30 of the remaining 190 SRAs were examined briefly to assist in verifying findings.

The full report provides a detailed analysis of the implementation challenges and lessons. This summary provides the key findings and learnings with a brief summary of the proposed way forward.

The most important message is that the majority of people in communities have embraced SRAs and see them as a significant new way of working with government to address issues in their communities. This is supported by ICCs and most government agencies including from other levels of government. However there are also issues which need to be addressed if the progress of the past four years is not to be lost or compromised.

We have titled this report *'Don't let's lose another good idea'* as a reflection of the concern that just as the evidence is emerging that something is working well, there will be a repeat of the old pattern of dispensing with a good initiative and trying something new. The review team urges that the lessons from this initiative are understood as being extremely relevant today and that the growing confidence of Indigenous communities in the SRA process is recognised and built upon.

## Brief Background

SRAs have been an important Australian Government policy initiative within a broader reform strategy for Indigenous affairs. They are aimed at building strong partnerships with Indigenous communities and between levels of government. The *Shared Responsibility Shared Future* framework was first developed for the eight Council Of Australian Government (COAG) Trials and extended in 2003/2004 to a broader program of SRAs across Australia. This broader program included both SRAs and the development of Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs). Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in 30 locations across Australia have played a key role in implementing SRAs and have driven and managed the process of development at the local level. SRAs are located in metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

The Secretaries' Group was charged with implementing the principles of the COAG *National Framework of Principles For Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians*. The principles are:

- Harnessing the mainstream
- Streamlining service delivery
- Establishing transparency and accountability
- Developing a learning framework, and
- Focusing on priority areas including those identified in *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*.

These principles were core to the Shared Responsibility Framework and remain crucial in the implementation of the new approach to Indigenous affairs.

## The conceptual framework of SRAs

The concept of SRAs is underpinned by a commitment by the Australian Government, and supported by the COAG Framework of Principles to allow SRAs to evolve and change in an effort to create a new, flexible and responsive way of doing business with Indigenous communities. This review has identified some core principles which have emerged over time, and these are now explicitly stated in several key policy documents. However the intention of the SRA process was to allow ICCs to work in partnership with Indigenous communities with minimal red tape and bureaucracy to address:

- priorities which communities saw as important to improving their circumstances
- fragmentation and lack of coordination in government programs and initiatives.

The key concepts identified and now articulated in this review are:

- *Partnerships within and between levels of government and with Indigenous*

*communities* are more likely to produce sustainable local solutions which work because no partner can address these complex issues in Indigenous communities alone – this is supported by whole-of-government approaches.

- *Engaging the mainstream and improving coordination* is essential to building sustainable changes in government services and ensuring communities get maximum access to services. As mainstream services are not necessarily available in remote communities this concept of mainstreaming is more of a focus in urban, including regional, communities. The improved coordination of government services and activities however is relevant wherever there is a community.
- *Communities are best placed to achieve changes in behaviour* which improve their life chances if they are engaged in *mutually accountable arrangements based on shared responsibilities and mutual obligations* and supported to work alongside government.
- *Investing government resources* in local initiatives should be a *shared responsibility between levels of government and across agencies*.
- *Negotiating agreed outcomes* together will require time and a good process of *shared leadership* from all partners.
- *A more flexible, coordinated funding regime* is required to ensure responsive and timely outcomes with Indigenous communities.

The review has revealed that all of these features are in evidence to some degree in the implementation of SRAs and that over time the practice of implementing SRAs has evolved in a positive way, which is valued and recognised by most partners. The evolution and improvements in process have progressed partly because of the permission to develop local responses for local circumstances.

## **The practice of SRA development**

### ***Support for the development process***

The early SRAs were assisted by a template for the development of agreements with broad directions, and by support from the Secretaries of Australian Government agencies involved in the eight COAG Trials. There were minimal detailed guidelines and, whilst this was reportedly somewhat unnerving for some ICCs, overall, communities and ICCs welcomed this new flexibility and ICCs built on their good relationships with local communities. ICC Managers, Deputy Managers, and other ICC staff over time had support via training which included the sharing at national meetings of lessons learnt. The creation of agency Solution Broker positions located within ICCs has assisted this development process.

Whilst there has been minimal formal information provided for Indigenous leaders on what

SRAs mean, and this was identified as an important lesson for engaging future communities in new SRAs, none the less community partners embraced the concept and have engaged proactively with the development process. A communication strategy regarding SRAs for communities is proposed. This report proposes an action learning approach with regular debriefing/yarning about what the process has been, how it has worked for both sides, and what the benefits are. This would support improvements in understanding and skills for all partners involved. Providing information in language and using interpreters were proposed as good approaches in traditional communities and such strategies should form part of the wider communication strategy on SRAs.

Training for government agencies in whole-of-government practice would also have assisted ICC and other agency staff as there is no shared agreement about what whole-of-government practice means on the ground. This remains an issue and is particularly important for staff new to departments or to SRA processes. Joint processes across agencies to work on whole of government skills are valuable and international evidence suggests that shared understandings emerge from joint training on integrated and whole of government initiatives.

### ***Coordinating government activity and funding - the role of ICCs and other government agencies***

ICCs have played a lead role in initiating and supporting SRAs, have fostered partnerships within government and across levels of government, and have played a major role in building strong partnerships with Indigenous communities. There is overwhelmingly good feedback from communities and many government agencies regarding the role played by ICCs since the inception of SRAs. Many Australian Government and state and territory government agencies have also embraced SRAs and there are examples of shared funding responsibility for many SRAs. However ICC staff, and some agency managers, report some significant barriers in achieving coordination of government funding in many cases and report particular challenges in achieving more flexible, simplified funding agreements across the funds committed for SRAs.

SRAs were meant to address red tape and foster more rapid and responsive funding solutions. Many participants and especially communities hoped that SRAs would achieve single funding agreements with common reporting arrangements. This has not been the case and most SRAs appear to have increased the number of agreements: i.e. there is an SRA with outcomes and indicators, and then as many as six to seven funding agreements attached, with separate indicators, reporting arrangements and monitoring systems.

In the case of SRAs that were judged to be only '*somewhat successful*' at the time of the review, a major theme was delays in implementation. The reasons for these slippages included delays in delivering funding commitments agreed to in the SRA.

There is some promising practice emerging in some ICCs with Solution Brokers and ICC Managers negotiating new SRA arrangements with a single funding agreement, common indicators and single reporting which meet the needs of all funding partners. This must be progressed as a matter of urgency or the credibility of the SRA process is in danger of being compromised and ICCs and agencies overwhelmed with unnecessary bureaucracy and administration.

### ***Building partnerships with communities***

Most communities appear in the main to be very supportive of SRAs and the SRA process. There is consistent positive feedback that this new way of working is very consistent with Indigenous customs, community traditions and values regarding working together, community and family obligations, and reciprocity. Whilst some individual SRA reviews reported that some Indigenous partners were not clear about the SRA process, most communities understood the concept and the intention and supported both the concept and the process. The communities interviewed during site visits have been particularly positive about the role of ICCs in building these partnerships and many want to see this practice extended to other agencies at all levels of government.

### ***Meeting commitments***

Many communities reported that they were able to negotiate and deliver on their responsibilities and commitments. However they believe that some government agencies are not as good at delivering on their responsibilities as they expect Indigenous partners to be. Hence they challenge notions of mutual obligations if these are one way. On the whole many government agencies appear to be meeting most of their commitments.

However across the 80 reviews and the site visits examined during this review there were significant examples of governments being slow to implement their funding commitments and, in some cases, this had significant consequences for communities.

Delays in funding allocations sometimes impacted on the capacity of the community to deliver on their commitments: for example achieving sustainable employment opportunities beyond CDEP; or addressing drug and alcohol issues through rehabilitation programs. Changes in policy also impacted on implementation in some SRAs<sup>1</sup>.

The role of the Australian Government in negotiating SRAs has been predominantly through the ICCs and the funding contributed by and partnerships with other governments need to be increased. This will require leadership and a commitment from all governments for a

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<sup>1</sup> This included some significant changes to CDEP over the last 6 months.

sustained effort at building on new ways of working. ICC managers need improved authority and delegation to negotiate on behalf of the Australian Government; other Australian Government agency managers need greater delegations to commit funding and to negotiate single funding agreements for SRAs.

### ***Behaviour change***

Identifying initiatives that lead to behaviour change was one of the most challenging implementation issues and over time this has improved in some ways and become more complicated in others. A major factor related to behaviour change in communities is the complexity of the issues facing communities. Whilst many within government saw SRAs originally as being directed at small, single issue matters, most communities see the intractable issues which they want to address as complex and requiring a holistic response. Thus there is a tension between those within government (and some non-Indigenous CEOs) who argue for simple, single issue SRAs, and communities who see some of the issues they want to address as complex and requiring multi-agency and comprehensive responses.

Behaviour change on some issues is not easy and this includes school attendance if issues related to drug and alcohol use, overcrowding in houses, and access to basic utilities are not addressed. This is a very difficult issue and one of the biggest challenges facing ICCs. It is also epitomised in the current crisis regarding child abuse; that is, the issues are interconnected, longstanding, and require strong partnerships with Indigenous people (communities, families and individuals). In more recent negotiations there is evidence of a change of approach that links individual benefit with individual behaviour change, as opposed to the stronger tendency towards community benefit for individual behaviour change in earlier SRAs. For example there are developments linking such benefits and behaviour as home ownership, tenancy, and home improvement, school attendance, family income management and economic development. These examples of attempts to address the complexity of issues facing communities need to be evaluated over time for sustained change and impact.

What is abundantly clear from this review is that communities want to remain engaged in SRA processes and see them as a positive and constructive way for all governments to do business with them.

### ***Sustainability – of the approach and of SRA outcomes***

Addressing issues of sustainability has been a feature in that SRAs were never intended to replace or substitute for funding or service delivery which is essential for any community in Australia such as utilities, education, basic health, or housing services. They were also not intended to fund initiatives which might require ongoing funding commitments. They were intended to try and address issues in ways which achieved some sustained behaviour change or enhanced community capacity.

Important sustainable benefits have been identified to date during this review including:

- capacity building at organisational and individual levels
- governance and administration skills for Community Councils and other Indigenous organisations
- skills, qualifications and work experience to enhance employment for individuals, and/or develop young people as future leaders
- gains from improved interagency co-operation and understanding, i.e. new connections, minimising duplication, improvement in partner services through contact with SRA workers.

The evidence from this review suggests that many ICCs are addressing ways in which the changes achieved during an SRA process can be sustained:

- the need for sustained leadership at the government level after signing SRAs - the report explores the concept of and criteria for a 'lead agency' role
- within the community sustaining the community effort and managing the funding has been shown to need some support through 'project management' expertise in the early stages of implementation
- SRA initiatives are very likely to lead to the identification of ongoing needs and issues and therefore further SRAs.

Ongoing or new funding from a variety of sources, including the private sector, may be signs of progress and create new opportunities for communities. Any non-negotiable opposition to future funding commitments seems out of keeping with the spirit of SRAs. The issues facing these communities are deeply entrenched and will not be solved in two to three short term SRAs. The SRAs may however act as a catalytic process for sustained change.

### ***Successful SRAs - lessons learnt***

From the evidence gathered in this review, SRAs were successful or on track where:

- the process is driven by the community and they feel they have a say rather than having obligations imposed - i.e. passive participation is avoided
- communities have built strong relationships of trust primarily through ICC engagement but sometimes through line agency staff working alongside ICC staff
- the Community Council or other community representatives have a strong representative grasp on the community's aspirations
- ICCs have played a strong and sustained role leading the process and fostering understandings across agencies and across levels of government
- the central participants are consulted, including women and young people

- community consultations are well promoted
- effort is directed to community capacity building
- achievements led to further cooperation between partners and generated interest from other communities to run similar programs
- training was provided in meeting practices and procedures where required
- contingency plans were developed with communities for when targets are delayed or not met.

## **Future options**

SRAs, as tools contributing to a major change in both policy and implementation in Indigenous affairs, have played a role in changing the way governments work with the communities involved and seem to be achieving some objectives that are aimed at changing circumstances over time. As community engagement has been improved, and trust and commitment have increased in both government and community the result has been positive responses to SRAs and the way of working on which they are based, and there is strong interest in communities in moving on to the next challenge.

Some key themes regarding the implementation of SRAS include:

- the pivotal role of the ICCs and ICC managers, and flexibility and responsiveness at the local level, needs to be maintained
- support for the leadership and staff development role of ICC Managers also needs to be maintained
- development of strategic thinking linked to simple effective indicators and outcomes, and whole of government and project management skills would be a valuable focus for the next stage
- action learning involving regular debriefing/yarning together about what has been learnt from practice would be an appropriate training style - this should include opportunities for community leaders to participate and share their perceptions
- a communication strategy on SRAs is required to build understandings across communities and to minimise perceptions that communities are being 'dragged' into this process with limited understanding, a perception this review found to be largely erroneous
- strategies for improved management of SRA 'projects' at the local level need strengthening, and improved project management skills for ICC staff would enable them to support community members to undertake project management tasks
- some local approaches to building project management capacity in communities might assist in sustainability and improved implementation – a strategy of this

kind would contribute to shared responsibility, improved governance and management, as well as to training and employment for community members where possible.

There are some elements of implementation which need to be progressed in the next stage of development of SRAs:

- delegations for ICC Managers has emerged as a critical issue to be addressed - this will require discussion with ICC Managers, State Managers of Australian Government agencies and possibly the Secretaries' Group
- the development of single funding agreements and single reporting across the funding commitments agreed to achieve outcomes for communities – drawing on work currently in train in some ICCs on this issue will be important
- clarification and exploration of the idea of a lead agency role to oversight the implementation of SRAs
- a combination of more comprehensive SRAs as well as the use of smaller single issue SRAs is likely to be a valuable way for ICCs to work
- further support to communities and government officers to learn from experience together and to avoid any tendency for a rigidity of approach to develop
- identifying and documenting examples of good practice in relation to harnessing mainstream services to develop the complementarity of Indigenous specific and mainstream services where mainstream services are available
- implementing joint training on whole of government approaches and improving support to ICCs to manage this element of SRAs
- exploring the links between SRAs as a tool and the learnings from SRAs for informing new developments in government interventions in complex issues<sup>2</sup>.

Funding, benefits and services are all tangible demonstrations to communities of commitments from governments. However the interpersonal, local level dimension of the behaviours and performance required of staff from all levels of Australian governments to demonstrate mutual obligation has been shown through SRAs to be equally powerful in the:

- engagement of communities
- establishing the foundations of new expectations between governments and communities and a new experience in working together for improved outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> Recent developments in comprehensive SRAs linking individual benefits to individual behaviour change are relevant here. The findings from this review affirm the value and significance of working alongside communities to find solutions to very difficult issues and challenge practices which are about 'doing to' communities.

## 1. Introduction

This Implementation Review (hereafter referred to as the review) of Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) is part of the program of evaluation activities for Indigenous programs managed by the Australian Government and in the context of the *National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians* adopted by the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) in 2003. It occurs also within the context of the *Evaluation Plan for Whole-of-Government Activities in Indigenous Affairs 2006-2009* of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) within the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

The review was undertaken by a team led by Morgan Disney & Associates between early May 2007 and July 2007 and included site visits to three Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) and 10 associated communities in the Northern Territory (NT), Queensland (Qld) and New South Wales (NSW). The review is an assessment of the implementation of SRAs with the core question being - *are SRAs being implemented as intended?*

The review was framed by a set of questions around five key areas of investigation:

1. SRA Conceptual Framework: What's the theory?
2. The Practical Application: What's the Practice?
3. Lessons Learnt: What have we learnt thus far?
4. Funding and Resources – how have these been developed/used?
5. Future Options – how to do better?<sup>3</sup>

This report therefore:

- outlines the methodology used for the review
- provides a summary of the history and context of the SRAs
- discusses the conceptual framework as derived from the policy and practice relevant to SRAs
- provides an analysis of the lessons learned regarding practice to date, funding and resourcing, lessons learnt, and what possible improvements have been identified, and
- suggests options for improvements.

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<sup>3</sup> These questions are outlined in the Brief for the Implementation Review and provided a framework for the methodology and the analysis.

## 2. Methodology

This review used a mixed-methods, qualitative research approach and included teams of two to three people doing the site visits. Three Indigenous consultants in the review team were included in every stage of the review. The detailed methodology included:

- an initial analysis of the completed individual reviews of 80 SRAs from across Australia to draw out themes and issues
- document analysis of the SRAs relevant to both the 80 completed reviews and to the SRAs examined and explored during the site visits
- a limited literature search of documents available at the time the SRAs emerged and more recent articles or documents regarding the evolution of SRAs
- an analysis of the available policy and practice documents from FaCSIA from inception through to the present
- extensive interviews using a semi structured survey with the three ICC Managers and the Solution Brokers in the Darwin, Coffs Harbour and Cairns ICCs
- interviews with SRA signatories in ten communities in the NT, NSW, and Qld
- interviews with representatives from other Australian Government, State/Territory and Local Government agencies in NT, NSW, and Qld
- interviews, meetings and focus group discussions with community members in the 10 communities in which SRAs were examined as part of the site visits
- meeting with officers in OIPC on the history and current context of SRAs
- telephone interviews with two FaCSIA State Managers
- a second analysis of the 80 completed individual reviews to test issues which emerged during the site visits, team discussions and analysis of the documentation.

It is important to note also that at the time this review was being completed the report into child sexual abuse in the NT was released, placing a considerable load on the FaCSIA staff involved. In two of the fieldwork sites the ICCs and organisations involved had been the subject of two other review processes within the previous month. Despite this level of scrutiny the communities and organisations involved wanted to contribute to this review. Only one identified community in the NT chose not to participate, as they felt overwhelmed by the attention the community was receiving. One of the communities in the NT was also the subject of considerable media attention throughout the review but chose to stay involved. The review team received high community support in every site visit.

The review team worked closely with the ICC Managers to agree on the sites to be visited and to ensure that the sample of SRAs was representative of those assessed by the ICC as working well and those not working so well. ICC Managers were very open and frank in their

advice and in their choice of SRAs and communities.

A sample of 10 SRA sites were agreed using the following criteria:

- different focus – e.g. employment, economic development, justice, business development, service access and facility use, health, social issues, mixed focus and flexibility, etc.
- specific groups focus – e.g. women, youth
- new and older SRAs to assess the evolution of practice
- partnership characteristics – e.g. those with only two signatories through to those with multiple signatories
- some from the 80 that have been reviewed and some not yet reviewed
- some with performance indicators and some with no indicators
- the size, range and flexibility of the funding – including in-kind
- some with specific behaviour change objectives and/or indicators
- one or two which had several SRAs in the one community.

The contacts with communities were initiated by the relevant ICC staff to ensure protocols with communities were followed.

**Attachment 1** provides the material provided to respondents to inform them about the interviews and focus of the review.

To distinguish between the information from the individual reviews and the work of our team we refer to:

- the **individual reviews** when we report on our analysis of the 80 individual SRA reviews which had been undertaken individually by a number of independent consultants and which formed a significant part of the data for this implementation review
- the **review team** to refer to the team led by Morgan Disney & Associates which undertook this implementation review.

## 3. Conceptual framework

### 3.1 Overview of the history and context of SRAs

This Implementation Review of SRAs is occurring in the context of major reforms for Indigenous policy and service delivery by the Australian Government which began in the early 2000s. During 2000 and 2001 major changes were taking place to reshape the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Indigenous affairs at the level of the Australia Government, and with State and Territory Governments through COAG involvement in some of these initiatives. In 2003 the financial administration of Indigenous programs, previously managed by ATSIC, was relocated into a newly created public service executive agency called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service (ATSIS). A set of proposed changes were outlined in 2004 for the following 18 months, including the establishment of the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC) in July 2004 and the abolition of ATSIC. By mid 2005 a new set of arrangements was in place; ATSIC was formally abolished in March 2005, and regional ATSIC councils ceased to exist as of 30 June 2005.

The pace of reform and several restructures of Indigenous affairs at the national level has created a significant limitation for this review as the corporate memory on the evolution of SRAs has been somewhat diminished. As a core purpose of the SRAs was to enable and foster flexibility, there were minimal detailed guidelines at the outset for how they would be implemented. We want to caution here that the fact that these guidelines were limited is not a criticism. If ICC managers were to genuinely engage with Indigenous communities, then they needed (and wanted) the flexibility and environment to do things differently. However accurately constructing the sequence of events and the evolution of SRAs has been one of the challenges for the review team and we note that we have constructed the background as best we could. The review team was struck by the level of misinformation which continues to exist about the intention and practice of SRAs, even at the government level.

#### ***A brief background on SRAs***

SRAs have been an important Australian Government policy initiative within this broader reform strategy for Indigenous affairs. SRAs are aimed at building strong partnerships with Indigenous communities, and partnerships between Australian Government agencies and other levels of government, to address disadvantage and priority issues for Indigenous communities. The *Shared Responsibility Shared Future* framework was first developed for the eight COAG Trials and extended in 2003/2004 to a broader program of SRAs across Australia.

The establishment of the new arrangements in Indigenous affairs in 2004 included a multi-

layered approach with the establishment of Ministerial leadership, the establishment of OIPC and the implementation of regionally based Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in 30 locations across Australia; metropolitan, regional and remote. From mid 2004 OIPC and the ICCs took on many of the functions previously undertaken by ATSIC and ATSIIS and were also to undertake a much wider role in coordinating the work of all Australian Government agencies delivering services to communities. OIPC is now located within FaCSIA.

ICCs became one of the major components of the reforms because of the front line role in relation to communities and their role in bringing together strategic investment in communities. A major focus of the new arrangements was an emphasis on *sharing responsibility* – across whole of government, with other governments, and with Indigenous communities.

### ***Support at the most senior level***

The new arrangements were supported by a senior executive level commitment to whole of government work through the Secretaries' Group. The Secretaries' Group Bulletins, of which there have been several relevant to SRAs, were used to communicate:

- the shared commitment to supporting the role of ICCs
- the expectations regarding the leadership role ICC managers were to take in facilitating whole of government effort at the local and regional levels
- the expectation that all Australian Public Service staff would operate flexibly and collaboratively in their work together, whilst reporting to their home departments.

The Secretaries' Group was charged with implementing the principles of the *COAG National Framework of Principles For Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians*:

- Harnessing the mainstream
- Streamlining service delivery
- Establishing transparency and accountability
- Developing a learning framework, and
- Focusing on priority areas including those identified in *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*.

Each year the Secretaries' Group produces an annual report on what has been achieved against these five priority areas. These principles sat behind the commitment to expand SRAs beyond the eight COAG Trials into a whole of government initiative by 2004.

In 2004 Minister Vanstone announced that the commitment to partnerships was being expanded to include:

- Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs) - agreements with networks at the

regional level which were to outline broad priorities and principles for the region concerned

- SRAs – agreements at the residential community or family/clan level. The SRAs were to set out community and/or family/clan and government responsibilities in agreeing on local priorities.

The ICC Managers Handbook (2004) provided a brief description of what was required of ICCs and included a sample SRA template.

At the ICC training in September 2004 Managers and Deputy Managers were advised that SRAs were to capture:

- agreed priorities
- investment and commitments from Indigenous communities, families and individuals
- investment and commitments from governments and other partners
- agreed outcomes, benchmarks and performance indicators.

This training stressed the concepts of incentives and behaviour change, notions of reciprocity between individuals and government or individuals and their community or family, and mutual obligation and self responsibility<sup>4</sup>.

### ***The change environment***

The 2006 reorganisation of Indigenous affairs located OIPC within the wider FaCSIA portfolio with some functions being mainstreamed into other FaCSIA branches. Thus in four years the Australian Government's administration of Indigenous affairs has been in constant change at the national office level. At the ICC level, whilst the restructuring has had some impact, for the most part ICC staff have continued to play a strong leadership role in implementing SRAs since mid 2004. The Secretaries' Group Bulletins have played a role in establishing and refining the role of ICCs managers especially in implementing both whole of government and shared responsibility initiatives.

The first SRAs were signed in 2003 as part of the COAG Trial process. By late 2006 190 SRAs had been signed with 147 communities. By early January 2007 eighty (80) of these SRAs had been individually reviewed by independent consultants. The following sections expand on the process of the evolution of SRAs, and outline the conceptual framework which continues to evolve.

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<sup>4</sup> Training material provided to the Review team for the purpose of this review.

## 3.2 The conceptual framework of SRAs in the first 2 years - 2003-05

In this section we identify the elements of the conceptual framework for SRAs. This framework is used in the next chapter to examine how SRAs have been implemented in practice. It is significant to note that there is a relatively small quantity of documentation available on the theory or conceptual framework of the SRAs. However, given that the idea of SRAs was to encourage flexibility and innovation, and had not been tried before, this absence of early documentation is perhaps not as important as establishing what level of documentation is required now to build on the lessons learned and to support future SRAs.

The primary source of information for this analysis is documentation from FaCSIA including some available on the OIPC website on SRAs.

### ***Purpose and objectives and how they evolved***

As outlined in the history above, SRAs emerged in the context of the Shared Responsibility Framework and COAG Trials in late 2003. Over the following 18 months to early 2005 documents provided by FaCSIA, and web-based documentation, describe SRAs as agreements that *'spell out what communities, governments and others will contribute to achieve long term changes in Indigenous communities'*<sup>5</sup>. SRAs are voluntary agreements with communities.

The purpose of SRAs that emerges from this documentation covers a number of elements:

- improvement of the social, economic wellbeing of Indigenous peoples and communities and improvement of services to these communities
- shared responsibility of the parties to the agreements - governments and community
- levels of government working together to address the complexity of factors to achieve improvement of circumstances
- investment of discretionary resources, new and existing, by governments
- identification of community needs and aspirations with the communities themselves
- mobilisation of self responsibility and capacity in Indigenous communities in a context of mutual obligation or reciprocity with governments
- mobilisation of other social partners - such as business and non-government organisations - in the context of mutual obligation
- measuring the outcomes and success, and learning lessons from the experience

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<sup>5</sup> SRA Fact Sheet of May 2005 from [www.indigenous.gov.au/sra\\_org.html](http://www.indigenous.gov.au/sra_org.html)

of developing SRAs.

Shared responsibility seems to have been used in two senses - greater shared responsibility in and between governments; and shared responsibility between governments and Indigenous communities. *Mutual obligation* is an aspect of this early outline of SRAs. A theme in discussion of shared responsibility and mutual obligation is summed up in the statement that:

*'the problems of Indigenous affairs cannot be fixed by governments working alone'*<sup>6</sup>.

The concept of 'whole of government' refers to managing across government agencies and jointly with State/Territory Governments<sup>7</sup>.

### ***What was government trying to address?***

Fragmented and uncoordinated government activities and expenditure were recognised to be a barrier to improving the circumstances of communities, therefore *developing greater flexibility, responsiveness and coordination* were objectives for SRAs. At the same time there was increased discussion of the need for communities to be given the opportunity to be involved in taking responsibility for action to address their circumstances. *Reduction of red tape and breaking down silos* were also frequently mentioned. Descriptions of SRAs for explanation to communities spoke of community aspirations such as the *'changes you want to make'* and *'the future your community wants for your children and grandchildren'* and also referred to the fact that SRAs would be different for different areas/communities.

There were some intended constraints on the SRAs which seem to be related to manageability, focus, and taking an incremental approach to building relationships and achieving success. A number of references can be found to the fact that SRAs were to have a 'small', 'single issue' focus leading to further SRAs as the partnerships and progress became more established, and, to more comprehensive SRAs where appropriate.

When announcing the first 52 SRAs in May 2005, the then Minister, Senator Amanda Vanstone, referred in her media release to *'.....these first single issue agreements are just the beginning. More comprehensive agreements will develop over time'*. This implies that single issue SRAs would be primarily time limited, but some respondents in this review see the SRAs as an enduring and overarching framework to which new project schedules can be attached over time. For this group of respondents SRAs are seen as the basis of an ongoing relationship with a community.

The intended timeframe for SRAs is therefore not clear from the documentation or interviews

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<sup>6</sup> Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs, *Annual Report 2005-06*, Australian Government 2006

<sup>7</sup> OIPC, FaCSIA, *Indigenous Affairs Arrangements* Australian Government 2006

with respondents. The timeframe for projects funded under the SRA Implementation Assistance Plan (SRAIAP) was intended to be short term, usually no more than one year, although a longer term could be applied under Regulation 10 of the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* if a situation meets certain criteria. The SRAIAP was introduced in the 2004/2005 budget in order to provide support to the development of workable and effective SRAs. Further information on the SRAIAP is provided in Chapter 5: Funding and Resources.

### ***The link between SRAs and Regional Partnership Agreements***

When the broader approach to SRAs was initiated in 2004 there was an associated development of the concept of Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs). These mechanisms were for regional planning, strategic investment and partnership as opposed to the local focus of SRAs. At the time this report is being written there are four signed RPAs however they are not reviewed as they are outside the scope of this implementation review. RPAs are being increasingly mentioned in the context of the need for more comprehensive SRAs and more regional approaches to coordination and investment.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's *Social Justice Report 2006* makes the point that RPAs were supposed to be one of the key mechanisms for engaging with communities at a more systematic regional level in the wake of the demise of ATSIC. As the comprehensiveness of SRAs is increasingly emerging as a trend, the *Social Justice Report 2006* raises the issue of whether there is some blurring between RPAs and SRAs and the need to think them through to avoid confusion<sup>8</sup>. We consider these links further in Section 4.2.

### ***New ways of working***

*Implementing a new way of doing business* was a further theme to the objectives, incorporating recognition that development of these new approaches, such as closer engagement with community, would take time. As outlined in the previous chapter, the coordination structures established in 2004 were part of the new arrangements, i.e. local ICCs, were to be the main vehicles for development of the SRAs. The ICCs were to undertake the negotiations at the local level, and at the national level OIPC was to develop policy, resources and tools to support the staff of the ICCs. State/Territory OIPC Managers were to assist with coordinating Australian Government agency involvement at the state/territory level. This role became the role of the FaCSIA State/Territory Managers in the 2006 restructure which located OIPC within the FaCSIA portfolio.

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<sup>8</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner *Social Justice Report 2006* HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC), Canberra 2007

### ***Engaging with the mainstream***

One of the principles of the *National Framework of Principles for Delivering Service to Indigenous Australians* was 'harnessing the mainstream' and in various documents related to SRAs this concept applies. This concept relates to access to and use and cultural appropriateness of mainstream services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in most documents is seen as complementary to Indigenous specific services. SRAs have been seen as a means of developing strategies to harness mainstream services, particularly in relation to SRAs in urban Indigenous communities.

### ***Partnerships and community governance***

*Partnership governance arrangements* at the local level are core to SRAs. This is established in the signatory arrangements between government and community. In the Bilateral Agreement between the Australian and NSW Governments reference is made to working with existing structures where they do exist, and where they do not exist, to working directly with and supporting these communities to develop appropriate structures.

In relation to governments, the governance arrangements are multi-layered and multi-party within departments, across departments, and between levels of government, but the role of the ICCs is intended to ground this at the local level.

Key groups have been established to support *integration, flexibility and collegiality* at various levels, such as COAG, the Australian Government's Ministerial Task Force on Indigenous Affairs and the associated Secretaries Group, and Bilateral Agreements with the states and territories. Research on integrated approaches<sup>9</sup> emphasises the need to address integration at each level in the system and it is important that this has been recognised in the development of the new arrangements. This does raise the question regarding how the voice of the other key partner in this overall initiative, the Indigenous peoples of Australia, is included at this national level. The Bilateral agreement with NSW does refer to this principle at the state level. This is not an issue of having elected representatives but of having a mechanism to give Indigenous views a voice and a presence not just at the local level.

### ***Issues of scope***

There are three aspects to the scope of SRAs:

- the scope of what they cover
- the scope of the issues that they can address and the commitments that

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<sup>9</sup> Research and Training Center on Family support and Children's Mental Health 2003, *Assessing the necessary agency and system support*, Focal Point Portland University, Portland can viewed at <http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/nwi/FocPtF0303.pdf>

- communities might make, and
- the scope of doing business differently.

There has been a clear, simple template for SRA Header Agreements since they were first introduced. The template directs those developing an SRA to such issues as objectives and community priorities, indicators, ongoing feedback between government and communities, and the partnership and governance arrangements.

The scope of the social issues to be addressed have been informed by a number of documents and sources including the:

- *National Framework of Principles For Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians*
- Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs and,
- areas of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* indicators developed for the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision by the Productivity Commission<sup>10</sup>.

The Productivity Commission reports on the outcomes for Indigenous Australians in relation to these indicators. An early resource document on SRAs for ICC staff gives useful detail on how these indicators might be valuable for SRAs. Issues such as early childhood intervention and school engagement, substance misuse, nutrition, community safety, business support, environmental health, employment and economic development, and skills development were suggested in early documentation. Working papers for an ICC Managers' workshop, held in November 2005, report that at that time housing, governance and capacity building were emerging as strong issues.

### ***Focus on change***

Consideration of the nature of SRAs in urban areas refers to working with the same framework but with '*more focus on individual incentives to change behaviour and mutual obligation, and more effective access and outcomes for Indigenous people from mainstream programs*'<sup>11</sup>. Behavioural change in relation to commitments of communities and community self responsibility is a theme in the scope of SRAs which raises a number of implementation issues which we review in the chapter on practice.

For communities, commitments which various documents gave as examples included:

- school attendance

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<sup>10</sup> SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2005 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage, Key Indicators 2005*, Productivity Commission Canberra

<sup>11</sup> Materials for a training session for ICC and State Managers of OIPC in September 2004

- controlling substance misuse
- being involved in youth recreation activities
- individuals commit to attend work experience and training
- communities participate in identifying local jobs, including potential jobs
- parents/carers commit to attend first aid and child safety courses
- parents commit to attend pre and post natal services
- communities develop, run and monitor a range of diversion programs - teaching traditional skills, once-off projects like maintenance on a community hall.

Doing business differently introduces concepts such as:

- capacity building in both communities and government
- community engagement
- partnership
- mobilising resources from a number of sources
- strategic investment.

### ***Investment***

In a draft document titled Shared Responsibility and Strategic Investment the statement is made that *SRAs will be the key mechanism for shaping government investment*<sup>12</sup>.

One major issue in the scope of SRAs is the relationship between the SRA and any funding agreements needed to deliver government commitments. Some of the material clearly indicates that an SRA involves the commitment of resources but other documents, and some of the senior staff interviewed during this review, see the SRA as a statement of relationship and commitment to work together. Presentations we have examined as part of this review however are quite specific that '*SRAs will capture ... investments and commitments from governments and other partners*' and the development process refers to the need to get agency buy-in before the SRA is signed<sup>13</sup>.

How this commitment, achieved through the SRA negotiation process, is then translated with minimal red tape into the funding agreement is an implementation matter of considerable concern to many stakeholders including ICC Managers. This issue has emerged as a very significant one for implementation which is examined further in Chapter 4 on the practice of SRA implementation.

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<sup>12</sup> OIPC Indigenous Coordination Centre *Shared Responsibility and Strategic Investment (undated)*

<sup>13</sup> Materials on SRAs provided to the reviewers by FaCSIA

### ***Development processes***

From early in the roll out of SRAs, implementation documents outlined stages of the *development process* such as:

- starting with background research on issues, programs and resources
- engaging with and listening to community about their priorities and issues
- identifying the other stakeholder agencies for resources and seeking in principle agreement to commit from them
- scoping the agreement in relation to:
  - meeting the principles of shared responsibility
  - achievable community priorities
  - measures and indicators
  - two-way feedback mechanisms
- jointly drafting the agreement (in some documents referred to as an exposure draft) with the community or family group - during this process ICC staff are involved in determining the agency's buy-in
- developing the implementation plan with milestones
- agreeing agency buy-in and obtaining sign off from government and community
- implementation and monitoring phase through the ICC.

### ***The leadership role of ICCs***

A presentation to an ICC Managers' and Deputy Managers' Training Session in August 2004 examined the challenges for ICCs and for ICC Managers. The challenges related to matters such as:

- developing the new perspective:
  - of working as Australian Government representatives not just as representatives of their agency
  - to promote whole of government solutions
- being locally focussed
- sharing ideas and information
- connecting Indigenous specific and mainstream programs
- negotiating agreements with communities and working in a multi-agency environment.

ICCs are seen as the first point of contact for Indigenous communities. In examining the practice of implementation of the SRAs the concept of a lead agency for some SRAs has emerged but there is no reference to this role in the documentation; this idea is explored later in this report.

### 3.3 Changes to the framework since 2005

In April 2005 the Secretaries' Group Bulletin<sup>14</sup> on the government's expectation on SRAs, confirmed the purpose of the SRAs:

*'SRAs are critical to making a difference on the ground and therefore a significant priority for the government in working for better outcomes for Indigenous people.'*

The Bulletin confirmed the emphasis on more flexibility to *'tailor to community needs more than has been used in the past'*. However while confirming that SRAs do not have to be *'complex documents that attempt to address all issues facing a particular community at the one time'*, the Bulletin goes on to say *'we want to see this building to a whole of community SRA that includes all discretionary spending'*. References to and resources on the development of more comprehensive SRAs can then be found in documents for the ICC Managers meeting held in July 2005.

In a further development of the framework in this same 2005 Bulletin there was a new phrase which has become common in more recent descriptions of the SRAs, namely that SRAs are *'to provide a discretionary benefit in return for community obligations'*. The identification of the benefits as discretionary (such as extra services, capital, or infrastructure in addition to essential services or basic entitlements) was to make clear that SRAs *'are not a requirement to access the benefits (or services) available to all Australians'*<sup>15</sup>.

A third clarification of the model in the Secretaries' Group Bulletin stated that SRAs do not need to involve all people resident in a community - i.e. the SRAs do not need to be *'whole of community'*. In fact in more recent times there has been more reference to clan or family SRAs, and to some individual SRAs. Although an original document for ICC Managers from 2004 does refer to SRAs being at the community or family/clan level, this theme of family/clan level does not seem to be strong in the background documents until recently.

This development of SRAs reflects the view of the Secretaries' Group that SRAs *'are new tools and will evolve over time'*.

Another strong theme in the April 2005 Secretaries' Group Bulletin was the need for staff at all levels to work together across departments:

*'to operate flexibly and collaboratively in developing the content of the SRAs. ....in ICCs and in delivering services to Indigenous people we work as one.'*

This was in recognition of the issues that were reported to be emerging in relation to working

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<sup>14</sup> Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs: Bulletin - [www.apsc.gov.au/indigenousemployment/bulletin0105.htm](http://www.apsc.gov.au/indigenousemployment/bulletin0105.htm)

<sup>15</sup> Further comments in an undated presentation on SRAs provided to the review team by FaCSIA

with more collegiality at all levels across departments, not only in the ICCs but at all levels. Secretaries further committed to invest in development of '*certain key skills*' and the ability of staff of the ICCs to work in a whole of government way. The importance of Solution Brokers is also mentioned.

In describing the scope of SRAs the Secretaries' Bulletin confirmed five key elements:

- one or more priorities identified locally by Indigenous people
- the commitments of government agencies to support initiatives to address those priorities
- the discretionary benefits to the community
- the commitments of the community (interestingly the Bulletin does not use the term 'mutual obligation')
- agreed regular feedback arrangements between the community and government.

Clarification of government signatories and the role of Secretaries at the local level were also included in the Bulletin. At this point delegation had not been given to ICC Managers to sign off at any level however not long after this they were given delegation for SRAs to \$100,000 under the SRA Implementation Assistance Program (SRAIAP).

In the timeframe in which SRAs have developed there have been new mechanisms introduced to underpin whole of government elements, for example there are meetings of State/Territory Managers' Forums of Australian Government agencies in each state/territory. Bilateral Agreements have been negotiated with states and territories which '*provide an overarching framework for our governments to work together*' on activities such as planning, and improvement of service delivery<sup>16</sup>. Bilateral agreements address jurisdictional overlap and connection issues that provide vital underpinning for the intergovernmental element of SRAs.

*Sustainability* has been an issue for the SRA framework but seems to be particularly emphasised in more recent documentation. Sustainability refers to the need for the planning and development of SRAs to consider whether there will be a need for ongoing funding and if so from what source this might be committed. This is particularly important where the SRA has involved funding for service delivery. However many SRAs are one-off projects for which the subsequent activity would have a new funding agreement.

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<sup>16</sup> Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of NSW p1.

### **More recent developments**

Risk management appears as an element in more recent materials for ICC Managers workshops.

The brief for this review referred to changes in priorities for governments, or for communities. At the framework level for government there seems to be a greater emphasis on linking the SRAs to the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* indicators and more discussion of the need for comprehensive SRAs, however this increased emphasis does not seem to be a significant change. In some locations there has been considerable effort to mobilise the SRAIAP funds to support community engagement and development of SRAs.

As the reviews of individual SRAs have been undertaken over the last 12-18 months changes of approach have been identified such as more focus on:

- SRAs with families and individuals
- Improving performance indicators, and
- keeping the relationships working after the SRAs have been signed<sup>17</sup>.

With regard to changes in priorities for Indigenous communities there is no formal way to assess this other than in examination on the SRAs in practice and we will examine that in the next chapter.

The emerging conceptual framework we have outlined in this section is confirmed in the current description of SRAs in the Indigenous Portal of the Australian Government website. This document also asks people to note that SRAs have evolved over time, that they are not identical to each other, and now have stronger emphasis on mutual obligations and performance information<sup>18</sup>.

## **3.4 Tools, information and resources**

There is evidence that a number of tools and resources were developed to support ICCs Managers and Deputy Managers who attended a series of workshops on SRAs since 2004. Tools and resources included:

- templates for both SRAs and SRAIAP header agreements, with examples and more recently a guidance document on creating schedules for SRAs
- a framework for developing indicators complete with examples

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<sup>17</sup> Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs Annual Report 2005-06 p5.

<sup>18</sup> [www.indigenous.gov.au/sra\\_info.html](http://www.indigenous.gov.au/sra_info.html)

- presentations to ICC Managers and Deputy Managers on the nature of SRAs, how to develop them, what they can contain, how to review an SRA, comprehensive SRAs, and risk planning for an SRA
- case examples and case studies
- leadership development for ICC Managers
- staff development and a skills audit of ICC staff
- data and evaluations to inform development of SRAs and of implementation approaches.

The SRA template gives a structure for development of an SRA with:

- an overview of the partnership
- objectives
- local priorities and outcomes
- performance measurement and evaluation
- dispute settlement arrangements
- review and variation arrangements
- timeframe
- project purpose, rationale, and outcomes (short and long term)
- the responsibilities of each of the partners
- indicators and benchmarks, and,
- reporting arrangements.

### ***How ICCs were supported***

The early and ongoing training for ICC Managers and Deputy Managers has been an obvious and important support in implementing the SRAs. When SRAs were first introduced there was a help desk function in OIPC, arranged by geographic areas, to support ICC staff. However on the basis of the material provided to the review team it is apparent that the key driving role of the ICC Managers and Deputy Managers meant that the training and resources were focussed on them with the expectation that they would lead staff development, particularly of Solution Brokers, in their ICC office. In the site visits it was apparent that some Australian Government agencies provide good support and resources to their Solution Brokers and some do not.

It is not clear how training and support arrangements are assisting as staff turnover occurs so that new staff receive orientation and support as they develop into their role. Several ICC and other government staff interviewed in site visits raised the need for better training to foster improved understandings of SRAs and whole of government efforts given how important these are in the current policy context.

*Four Expert Panels* and a multi-use list of community facilitators and coordinators were

established by OIPC to be available to work with communities for capacity building on organisational, governance and financial issues to support effective implementation of SRAs.

The 2006 SRAIAP Interim Operations Manual<sup>19</sup> is particularly detailed and includes coverage of the internal administrative processes of submissions, approvals and database. The national office of OIPC can assist with exposure drafts, agency buy-in, developing performance indicators, monitoring and reporting processes, and funding applications.

### **Brief Summary**

There are two main sources of information on the conceptual framework:

- the policy documents identified in this chapter
- the material for the series of workshops for ICC Managers and Deputy Managers.

The conceptual framework has evolved with some core concepts being partnerships, various expressions of reciprocity, flexibility, mainstreaming, shared funding, whole of government, and outcomes.

The documentation available has also evolved. The purpose, objectives scope and process of SRAs are clear in these documents. However it is not clear how well known or widely used the documents are now in the ICC offices as knowledge of the documents varied across ICC staff interviewed during the site visits. It would be valuable to organise them more formally and to consider a strategy for updating them and disseminating them.

While approaches to the detail of implementation are evolving, the overall framework of elements provided in this chapter has been consistent. Over time some aspects have received more attention such as the need for new ways of working and more collegiality within the ICCs to achieve new flexible and responsive SRAs. Sustainability and also the role of harnessing the mainstream are also being given more attention now in some ICCs.

A body of new knowledge is now emerging from practice which supports the concepts which underpinned the original intention and the development of SRAs. The 80 individual reviews provide a strong body of evidence regarding both the conceptual framework and the implementation. Many of the themes in the individual reviews were affirmed in the site visits.

In the next chapter we outline how the implementation practice has evolved.

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<sup>19</sup>FaCSIA *SRAIAP Interim SRAIAP Operations Manual for STOs and ICCs*, October 2006

## 4. The practical application of the framework in SRA implementation

In this chapter we review the practice of implementation of the SRAs since their inception and present our findings from the full review process.

We have drawn out the themes and trends from the 80 individual reviews (which we further tested in site visits) and have been informed by the more detailed information gathered in the sites visits through key informant interviews. The individual reviews are brief - two to four pages – and vary in what aspects they cover, therefore sometimes the information is quite limited on a particular issue.

The conceptual elements of the framework are examined in relation to sections addressing:

- whether the SRAs are being implemented as intended
- whether the method for developing SRAs is understood and consistently applied
- how the concept of shared responsibility is understood
- the form of partnership implemented
- whether government officers understand and successfully implement SRA negotiations and delivery.

A number of issues are covered in each of these sections. While funding issues are referred to in this chapter they are primarily addressed in Chapter 5.

Before providing the more detailed information on implementation we believe it is useful to report that, despite what might have been expected based on some adverse publicity about SRAs:

- there is good support for SRAs in many communities and amongst the staff of the various agencies represented in ICCs and in some other government agencies
- the review findings show that generally SRAs appear to be creating excellent opportunities to forge stronger partnerships between Indigenous communities and spheres of government, and for communities to put community priorities before government
- the SRA concept seems to be basically sound and workable but needs more time to be bedded down, and some refining – especially around delegation, funding, coordination with other government agencies, and communication to communities and other agencies and levels of government.

## 4.1 Intention and practice

SRAs are intended to improve the circumstances of the Indigenous communities who are signatories to and partners in each SRA, through a new way of working with the communities based on shared responsibility. The process was seen as being as important therefore as the outcomes. Some of the key intentions are addressed throughout this chapter. The aspects of the intended purpose covered in this section relate to the focus of the SRAs reviewed on:

- the purpose and nature of SRAs
- the type of outcomes and indicators targeted to achieve change
- the types of issues and activities that are the focus of the SRAs.

### ***Implementation of the purpose of SRAs***

It appears to this review that the majority of the SRAs in the sample examined are being implemented as intended. However there were examples where the intention was not in the end being achieved because a partner did not 'buy in' or funding did not eventuate as promised or planned. SRAs seem to be making things happen for some communities more quickly and in many cases it was believed, often strongly, that the project or activity would not have happened without an SRA process. Comments indicated that these were situations where the community was supportive of the project and therefore it was important that the SRA did make it happen.

Implementation of intended aspects of the framework observed in the sample include:

- developing agreements with communities based on commitments from both sides to undertake activities that have been identified as addressing priorities that have the potential to improve the circumstances of communities, families and individuals
- the identification of discretionary benefits for the community particularly bringing together a range of resources, including community resources in new, coordinated and flexible ways - contributing to some breaking down of silos
- addressing the elements of the template including identifying indicators
- whole of government approaches in the sense of several Australian Government agencies being involved
- SRAs that are diverse because of the differences between the communities
- most efforts by ICCs seem to have tried to allow adequate time for development of the SRA with the community. However a finding emerging from the analysis of the individual SRA reviews was that some signatories believe that their SRA was finalised in haste. This may be particularly related to a reported sense that when original targets were set for the number of SRAs that needed to be developed by

ICCs, there was pressure to get them finalised more quickly.

As the emphases changed, as outlined in the previous chapter on the framework, some of these aspects were also picked up. More SRAs are being developed with families and individuals over the last year. During site visit interviews there were positive reports of staff in different agencies in ICCs working together more effectively, and evidence that many staff are working on sustainability of outcomes for the SRAs. In some ICCs in urban areas there is also more consideration of the implications of '*harnessing the mainstream*' with examples particularly of SRAIAP initiatives to address access issues. Obviously this is harder in remote areas where mainstream services may be very thin on the ground.

### ***Funding as a core implementation issue***

One of the intentions that has been harder to implement is the delivery of funding. The process of finalising the funding agreements were frequently reported to be frustrating effective implementation. This was particularly evident in some of the site visits. In the case of one agency, with a well established area consultative structure (which exists for good reasons) the process nevertheless means that there has been up to a two-year delay before it was clear whether that agency would in fact meet the commitment to funding. This was a frustration mentioned in relation to a number of SRAs and often involved the same agency.

A further implementation issue in relation to funding is that despite the SRA bringing together a number of sources of funding in flexible ways, the different agencies still require their specific funding agreement with the result that there are multiple funding agreements attached to the one SRA. It was a frequent comment from ICC staff and some agency staff interviewed that this does not contribute to reducing red tape but is actually increasing it.

### ***Single issue and comprehensive SRAs***

The desire for single issue SRAs is complicated in implementation. Evidence from both the site visits and the individual reviews, suggests that single issue SRAs are capable of being more effective than complex, comprehensive SRAs.

However this seems to be more often because of the difficulty that government has in managing complex projects, rather than because communities could not relate to them or did not have a holistic idea about the issues that need to be addressed. In fact most communities interviewed see their issues as complex, interrelated and requiring a holistic response. Some communities were concerned that while the success of one project was good and a demonstration of government commitment, one project could not address the community's priorities holistically enough. They were keen for a clear commitment to a progression of projects or a more comprehensive agreement or plan. One-off funding is said to be common for Indigenous communities so some community members interviewed were concerned that the SRAs they were involved in were a continuation of fragmented and uncoordinated resourcing of communities.

Staff in FaCSIA advised the review team that approximately 30 SRAs are being extended or broadened in scope.

This finding presents a dilemma for governments. Communities see no problem with comprehensive approaches and conceptualise their issues in this way; governments are the parties having difficulty in managing this complexity and in finding solutions which sit well for communities.

A single funding agreement for pooled funding to address complex issues remains a very elusive goal, communities repeatedly asked why this is not being achieved and is so hard to do.

**Case example:** In one community visited by the review team the ICC involved is currently experimenting with a single funding agreement with the support of other agencies. This initiative involves two Solution Brokers working together to develop some agreements on shared outcomes, joint indicators and a single agreement with one report required and provided to all funding agencies. Progress needs to be monitored on this initiative.

### ***Implementation of the intended scope of SRAs***

Implementation in relation to the scope of SRAs is seen in the type of outcomes and indicators targeted to achieve change and the nature of the issues and activities that are the focus of the SRAs.

An analysis of the main focus for the stated outcomes and activities set out in the sample of SRAs examined shows that the intended scope is being addressed in that:

- skills development and education was a predominant stated outcome area - e.g. projects to develop employment skills and improved school attendance; skills in enterprise development; and promotion of Aboriginal art and culture
- improved health through participation in sporting activities, nutrition programs, alcohol rehabilitation and/or general health and hygiene
- other key areas are:
  - reduction of substance abuse including petrol sniffing
  - improved lifestyle and involvement in community planning
  - economic development activities
  - youth development
  - leadership development.

**Case study:** An SRA in a remote island community for a youth oriented initiative has wide support from a couple of significant local Indigenous NGOs and is strongly supported by mainstream agencies including education and health agencies from both the Australian and State Governments. However all of these same agencies argued for better communication with the wider community about SRAs, including through using translators and languages. This was seen as very important where communities are trying to grapple with such complex issues as school attendance and compliance with 'no school/no pool' initiatives. There was a strong concern that women are not being adequately supported to understand the implications of SRAs and that issues of enough sleep, safety, and adequate food all impact on school attendance and sometimes these are beyond the capacity of the women alone to control.

### ***The implementation strategies***

Nearly all of the SRAs sought to deliver their objectives through a range of activities. In more than half of the individually reviewed SRAs physical facilities (e.g. buildings, sports fields, bus, market garden) were central to delivering the objectives. These were split evenly between new facilities and the renovation of existing infrastructure. For many of these SRAs examined during the site visits activities were also linked to facilities, particularly employment and training associated with the work involved and/or commitments to attend activities in order to be able to use the facility - the most common was a linkage to school attendance. As SRAs have progressed, issues often emerge about ongoing maintenance and ownership of facilities developed through SRAs.

The focus for the remaining SRAs was on new or existing programs and employment of project workers.

Flow on effects from successful SRAs were identified as:

- further cooperation between partners
- increased trust between communities and ICCs and, therefore governments
- an interest in future SRAs
- interest generated from other communities to engage in similar SRA processes.

It is noteworthy that unexpected benefits usually arose from the SRAs even where very few objectives were delivered – e.g. “strengthened social networks” or “a resolve to rethink and follow other approaches” were reported as unexpected benefits.

From some of the site visits the review team provide the following summary on the implementation they observed and which had been reported to them:

- communities have a greater trust in SRAs

- there is strong evidence of improved relationships being developed with other agencies, especially with state/territory government agencies, who have generally 'warmed' to the idea of the SRAs
- the ICCs are generally taking a more strategic approach, i.e. maintaining a focus on what is to be achieved, and this is supported by communities and other government agencies at all levels
- ICCs are now becoming involved in family based SRAs.

## **4.2 Understanding of the methods used for developing SRAs**

In assessing the clarity of understanding of the methods used to develop SRAs and whether this methodology has been consistently applied, it is important to recognise that the methodology:

- does not seem to have been broadly publicised
- was more indicative of the directions intended and was deliberately not prescriptive.

However the broad direction was clear and seems to have been understood by most partners to the extent that could be expected for such a major change across agencies, levels of government and reaching out to communities. This was an ambitious change but one that was in many ways parallel to a number of initiatives based on partnerships and integrated approaches. In particular there are concurrently models of this kind being developed in mainstream service delivery and community planning nationally and in Indigenous affairs by some of the state and territory governments.

Staff who moved to ICCs from ATSIC also had an understanding of some aspects of the approach - key informants referred to Solution Brokers who had been previously in ATSIC as having the skills and experience relevant to the development of SRAs. Many ICC Managers and Deputy Managers have well established community relationships and built on these both with communities and their counterparts in other agencies. However the fact that this approach is part of a new generation of initiatives to address complex social problems does not mean that these approaches are in fact very well understood by many people as yet. These approaches are still evolving, as is the SRA model.

### ***Support from Secretaries***

The issuing of the edition of the Bulletin by the Secretaries' Group<sup>20</sup> early in 2005 indicates that there was a need to reinforce some key aspects of the model. One respondent expressed the view that it was not that people were not understanding or resisting the model but that they had not known how to make the model work and there were entrenched systems and attitudes to overcome. In addition, although communities may have understood the methodology, some were wary of the intentions and were cautious in approaching the process and the people presenting the ideas. The support from the Secretaries' Group appears to have been very important especially for supporting ICC Managers.

### ***Allowing time for SRAs to evolve***

The situation is perhaps well summed up by the comments from a group of ICC staff interviewed to the effect that SRAs have been difficult and frustrating, particularly in the early days when processes were untested, but the ICC staff now have a better understanding of how to deal with them and are making progress. The ICC staff interviewed believe that the development of SRAs remains a demanding process because of the negotiation and reliance on a number of players. They believe the process still needs refinement, but overall they were very positive albeit concerned at the workload impact. This workload impact appears to be significant and may have been addressed in the concurrent evaluation of ICCs. This should be addressed in the next year as it is very clear from this review that ICCs have played, and will continue to play, a very significant role in the successful evolution to date of SRAs. ICCs are shaping practice and breaking new ground but there will be a limit to the number of SRAs ICCs can sustain and maintain.

### ***Tools and resources***

The SRA template provided to ICCs at the outset was of some use but views about this differed across ICC staff interviewed. In 2006 an Interim Manual was produced with operational guidelines for the State and Territory Offices (STOs) and ICCs. This was associated also with the delegation that had been introduced for ICCs Managers to be able to approve funds to \$100,000 from the SRAIAP. This Manual was clear about operational and administrative steps to be taken and is the most concise and clear document on a key aspect of the development of an SRA. A very experienced ICC Manager was very clear that this is assisting their implementation role.

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<sup>20</sup> Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs: Bulletin - [www.apsc.gov.au/indigenousemployment/bulletin0105.htm](http://www.apsc.gov.au/indigenousemployment/bulletin0105.htm)

***Identification of potential SRAs and community priorities***

SRAs are intended to be locally focused and to be based on community identification of the issues to be addressed to improve their circumstances. Two aspects of the development process relevant to this are:

- how the SRA is initially identified
- evidence of who was involved in the determination of the need.

In the 80 individual SRA reviews many do not identify who initiated the SRA. Where this is indicated, the most common group were those in which the ICC was said to be the initiator, but there were also a number in which it was said that initiation was by both the ICC and the community, and others where people had different perceptions about who had initiated the process. In the site visits the issue of who initiated the SRA differed although, in almost every case, the issue had come from the community. The ICC may have suggested the SRA process as a circuit breaker or as a core strategy at supporting the community's efforts and/or interest.

Examples of other first steps were:

- a community leader with a special interest raising an issue with an ICC staff member
- a group of young mothers approached the local Health Nurse who approached the ICC
- women from the Women's Council raised the idea
- an idea from the Queensland State Government Negotiating Table discussions
- expansion of an existing State Government initiative – SRA provided an opportunity to formalise and secure further commitments.

Comments on risk management and monitoring related to:

- the need for improved and joint risk management processes - risk management was seldom mentioned in the individual reviews or site visits
- the practicalities of monitoring progress where the ICC staff are not on the ground - however there were a number of examples where staff were visiting regularly and this was valued by the community partners
- the need to have clear and realistic milestones to reduce the occurrence of delays that might be expected
- a concern on the part of some communities that there should be two-way reporting to implement real shared responsibility - it was the perception of these groups that the community was being monitored but the government and other partners were not
- the need for a clear lead agency role to ensure ongoing facilitation and

monitoring is undertaken.

In the main the monitoring mechanisms in the SRA agreements focus on community responsibilities. The timeframes for key milestones rarely cover government responsibilities for example funding linked to project milestones.

### ***Flexibility, responsiveness and consistency***

Flexibility is emerging as a very significant factor in SRAs both in the way that SRAs are developed and shaped, and the commitment of funds; and in responsiveness to changing circumstances as the projects proceed and evolve. The first aspect of flexibility, i.e. flexibility in development and design of SRAs, has been addressed in the previous section on intent.

The findings on responsiveness by governments to circumstances is mixed, ranging from examples of significant rigidity to examples of impressive, timely and appropriate responses to changes. This responsiveness was found not only in the government but also in the communities. In one case it was a leader in the community who identified that the project desperately needed the employment of a project manager to organise changes to avoid running out of funds before the end of the project. An example of rigidity was the reported inability of government to approve use of some capital equipment for an unforeseen crisis that was not related to the SRA but which was causing major disruption for the community and therefore for the SRA.

As described in the outline of the conceptual framework in Chapter 3 of this report, it was expected that SRAs would be different for different communities and would evolve, therefore it is important to be clear about what would indicate consistency of application. The interpretation used for this review is to assess *whether the majority of SRAs followed the general principles of the framework, the template and the stages of development*. It is to be expected that with nearly 200 SRAs being developed, across 30 different ICCs, that there would be some variations. In this context the review team believes that the SRAs are generally being consistently applied in relation to most major framework elements as evidenced in the sample of 80 individual reviews and the site visits.

Some specific issues raised about consistency were:

- In the individual reviews the suitability of the project for SRA funding was only raised in a small number of SRAs: this included queries about appropriateness of bridging funding, funding for disaster relief, reliance on ongoing funding for success, and projects that should be funded under mainstream funding such as municipal services.
- From more detailed information gathered in the site visits, in the cases where there had been reliance on ongoing funding or the funding of municipal services, this was because of specific circumstances and the funding was seen as

important to the achievement of key priorities of an SRA.

- In these circumstances the partners then needed to have a sustainability plan to ensure that the achievement was not lost by the termination of funding. This required that the agency which should have been contributing funding needed to be successfully engaged.
- There appears to be some inconsistency in relation to documentation, risk management and monitoring, and allowing time for development. This is an important issue for effective implementation given that there may be less commitment and understanding if agreements are finalised in haste.

### ***Progress in delivery***

Progress and improvements in delivery of SRAs were identified in the individual reviews and the site visits and these were:

- improved community relationships are the most frequently reported positive outcome in the individual reviews, mainly within the Indigenous community, but also beyond the community with identified gains including community cohesion, clearer goals, and improved negotiation skills
- improved capacity and capacity building are frequently reported at organisational and individual levels with increased governance and administration skills for Community Councils and other organisations as well as skills, qualifications and work experience to enhance employment for individuals
- improved interagency co-operation and understanding, i.e. new connections, minimising duplication, improvement in partner services through contact with SRA workers.

### ***Comprehensive SRAs***

As outlined in Chapter 3 on the Conceptual Framework, there seems to have been an initial expectation that SRAs would become more comprehensive over time. As the practice of SRAs has developed two main forms of comprehensive agreement have emerged. These comprehensive SRAs are distinct from RPAs which are agreements at the regional level which outline broad priorities and principles for the region concerned. The main difference between an RPA and a comprehensive SRA appears to be the size of the area to be covered and the specificity attached to the SRA.

The two forms of comprehensive SRAs emerged at different times and reflect new thinking about the range of issues on which SRAs need to focus to be more strategic and focussed in their intervention. An example of the early form of comprehensive SRA was shown in a community visited as outlined in the following case example.

**Case example:** The ICC involved was seeking to support a community which had already developed a community plan. The ICC staff were working with the community and resourcing them with SRAIAP funding to work on bringing together the different groups in the community and also bringing together the resources that both the Australian and State Governments concerned were interested in investing in this community. The community's plan was focussed on what might be called traditional community plan elements of new community programs and projects such as a community garden, programs for children, and job creation.

This early form of comprehensive SRA is in contrast to the style of SRA negotiated more recently which links individual benefit with individual behaviour change, as opposed to the community benefit for individual behaviour change in earlier SRAs. The more recent SRA negotiations seem to have focussed on linking for example such benefits and behaviour as home ownership, tenancy, and home improvement, school attendance, family income management and economic development.

One of the core implementation issues, which must remain at the forefront of any future SRA development, is the importance of SRAs not being used for essential services to which the general public has a right. However this can be quite complex in Indigenous communities and the issue of what constitutes 'essential services' is contested. Some government officers interviewed in site visits expressed concern that some health services such as mental health and drug and alcohol services are accessible in urban and regional centres but are often not available in remote areas. In another example in one current negotiation around an SRA, municipal services are the focus and the ICC is grappling with this as an issue of access to services to which the general community has access. However the services have been provided in the past through an Indigenous NGO. This is currently being renegotiated as there have been some issues in the management of these by the NGO.

Some Indigenous communities locate these complexities in the context of comprehensive SRAs and want to see all governments grapple with the issues of how to ensure Indigenous communities have access to a good range of services and opportunities. It may need an audit of all SRAs, existing and in train, to assess how many are addressing what are clearly within the government's agreed understanding of essential services, which are on the edge or less clear and which sit very clearly outside that understanding. This is a threshold issue and requires some careful discussion and may require some consideration of what governments actually believe to be essential services. This might also need to be tested with some Indigenous leaders in remote areas.

### ***Brief summary***

In summary, the implementation methodology is evolving, and parties to the process and the agreements are contributing to this evolution as everyone develops a better understanding of how to progress SRAs. However because of the evolutionary process there are inevitably aspects of the implementation that indicate both the improvements needed, and the lessons that can be learnt from the experience.

The 80 SRAs that have been individually reviewed and the 10 that were visited in site visits were developed at different times over the last 5-6 years. The important issues are whether overall the understanding is evolving, and implementation is increasingly consistent. It is our view that overall this is the case and the support for SRAs that we found in communities and in ICCs can also be seen as an indication of these improvements.

In the next sections we explore these matters further in relation to some key aspects of the model and methodology. Development of best practice guidelines and examples for developing and designing SRAs would be valuable to produce now drawing on the experience and lessons of the last two to three years. To reduce perceptions of increasing bureaucracy and red tape, it may be better to think of and to document these as codes of practice.

## **4.3 The concept of ‘shared responsibility’**

As pointed out in the previous chapter, shared responsibility in this context has two meanings - greater shared responsibility in and between governments; and shared responsibility between governments and Indigenous communities. It is worth exploring further this issue of what shared responsibility means, particularly to Indigenous communities. This issue of the understanding by Indigenous communities continues to be a source of contention in the public discussion of SRAs.

### ***Shared responsibility in government***

Shared responsibility between governments in SRAs relates to inter-agency sharing in the Australian Government and sharing between the different levels of government. The parties to the SRAs need to work together to address complex problems rather than working separately, sometimes doing this in ways that are contrary to each other or in overlapping/duplicating roles and thereby possibly wasting effort. The shared responsibility is expressed in both staff time committed and funds provided.

Inter-agency sharing of responsibility is the strongest demonstrated form of shared responsibility in governments, with the involvement of staff across agencies in the

development of SRAs and in the proportion of SRAs to which agencies other than the ICC contribute funding. However SRAs in which other departments contribute are not yet as great in number as those which are funded only by OIPC through the ICCs. It was not possible to be clear how many of the SRAs are actually funded under the SRAIAP, which are sometimes solely ICC funded based on the ICC Manager's delegation to spend up to \$100,000.

The Bilateral Agreements between the Australian and the state and territory governments provide the overarching framework for intergovernmental shared responsibility. The Bilateral Agreements clarify how each side needs to work for their activities to be complementary and to add value to other activities as well as to the development of SRAs. It is difficult to measure the aspects of shared responsibility that are not quantified in the SRA documents in dollars and in-kind contribution and yet these elements are notable. In some places state government officers are located in ICCs and work on joint planning and development activities that underpin SRAs (e.g. NSW), and where there are existing regional planning mechanisms the ICCs work in that context (e.g. Qld).

Examples of state/territory government departments that contribute to SRAs are - Departments of Aboriginal Affairs/Indigenous Affairs; Education and TAFE; Health, Sport and Recreation; Police; and Community Development. In funding terms state and territory governments contributed a total of \$3.4 million to 71 of the 80 SRAs that have been individually reviewed. Funding issues are discussed further in Chapter 5.

Overall, sharing responsibility between levels of government seems to be progressing at the local level in relation to the state and territory governments. Direct contribution of resources by state and territory governments is not as great as either OIPC funded or Australian Government interagency funded SRAs. However it is not inconsequential and, from the limited state and territory government agency representatives interviewed in site visits, there was strong interest from many of these agencies in maintaining the approach.

Local government is less frequently involved and the most frequent form of local government contribution was 'in-kind'. The total financial contribution from local government to the 71 SRAs mentioned above was \$1 million. In some of the communities the local government entity is an Indigenous organisation but this is not always clear in the documentation so we cannot be certain whether these have been identified as Indigenous or local government. It may be important to try to clarify this in future if the engagement of local government remains an important goal.

There are inevitable tensions between agencies and levels of government but in the SRAs examined very few major problems that undermined shared responsibility were identified.

In fact this relationship is perhaps summed up in the statement of one state government

officer that:

*'it is a great way to work with the Commonwealth'.*

However in one jurisdiction there was some inconsistency across state government departments, with two line agencies telling the review team they thought an SRA was a great initiative supported by the government involved, and another line agency telling the team it was not supported by the same government involved. In this particular SRA the community was very positive about the SRA.

### ***Shared responsibility with communities***

In the original documentation on SRAs referred to in Chapter 2, and the attitudes of a small number of government officers and non-Indigenous CEOs of Indigenous organisations interviewed, there were assertions that communities would not understand the concept of shared responsibility or would need to be educated about it. However the review team found that there was commonly a good understanding from communities, based in their culture. In one site visit an Elder gave a riveting non-verbal demonstration of shared responsibility and then articulated it in a very sophisticated explanation. In another community members interviewed said it was what was meant by a word in their language meaning a 'two-sided affair'. In many communities interviewed the review team was struck by the depth of understanding of the concept, the implications for practice and the resonance with concepts of community, reciprocal relationships and familial obligations to each other.

The individual reviews on the other hand found that there were appreciable numbers of members of communities that did not seem to understand the SRA process. From our site visits this is not necessarily an indication that they do not understand shared responsibility but rather that some processes involved in these agreements are not well understood. This is not surprising since some non-Indigenous people including government officers were not clear on the processes because of the evolving and complex nature of these initiatives.

Training on Indigenous culture would assist those officers who do not already have such knowledge to appreciate that several of the key concepts of these new arrangements in Indigenous affairs are very compatible with traditions, values and concepts in Indigenous communities. There were clear examples of staff in the ICCs who *do* understand this. Cultural training would assist those who do not to guard against an expectation of a greater demonstration of engagement with the SRA projects than is expected of people from governments. In most cultures interpersonal connection is important to a sense of shared responsibility not just the provision of funds.

Indigenous community members are not usually paid to attend meetings related to SRAs. If they are in full time jobs they may be taking part in this work in an unpaid capacity after hours while they see government officers are being paid. In some communities there are

community members in paid positions for the community who can therefore take part in the SRA in that capacity.

**Case study:** In a larger remote community, with an SRA focused on young people and strongly supported by the wider community (especially the Elders), implementation issues are related to the opposition by some non-Indigenous staff in Indigenous NGOs claiming that their communities did not understand shared responsibility. On the contrary the review team heard a high level of support from community leaders for the way government was engaging with this community and a wish that more government agencies would visit and engage as the ICC had in the context of the SRA. The positive engagement of NGOs is one of the goals and outcomes the community asked to be included as one of their commitments. One Elder in this community gave a very sophisticated explanation of shared responsibility as being very consistent with Aboriginal customs and values of reciprocity and obligations. (A more detailed case study is given in **Attachment 2**)

Where ICC staff do understand and work with the cultural relevance of shared responsibility, the focus of working with communities is on the identification of the strategic issues that can make a difference and on understanding the nature of each other's responsibility and commitments and how they are expressed in behaviour.

Shared responsibilities in Indigenous communities relate to different issues because there is no resourcing through taxation or the type of social contract about services that exists in non-Indigenous communities. However the reciprocity and mutual obligation of relationships in communities are strong. It is not shared responsibility that needs to be agreed upon but rather:

- the particular focus of shared responsibility in this context
- how the governments and other parties will demonstrate their responsibility in ways that matter to the community and which they recognise will change their circumstances
- the changes of behaviour (e.g. school attendance) that are agreed by the community will most likely lead to changes in circumstances for individuals, families and communities
- what support is required for the community to achieve those changes in behaviour.

Some of these behaviour changes do not see major benefits for a reasonably long time and the overall improvement of the circumstances of a community may take even longer. However in at least one community the effect on the whole community of a successful SRA project was seen within 12 - 18 months.

**Case example:** In one community visited, with leadership from a community member with a particular interest in the environment, an environmental health project with strong training and employment elements was successfully completed. This was a small community with poor access to services although not classified as remote. Members of this community have now had employment opportunities in projects of this kind elsewhere. In a period of 12 to 18 months the community has grown in confidence and optimism and this has been a powerful story for the community themselves. One community member commented that they are now '*ready for another challenge*'.

Information about success stories such as these would be valuable to spread through other Indigenous communities. In one ICC, if a community says they are not interested in developing an SRA, the ICC staff give them the contact details for a community with a successful experience and suggest that they might like to speak to someone from that community. This word of mouth process has changed the attitudes of communities in this area.

If the processes are not well understood by communities the result may be that communities accept the government commitments for the sake of the community even though their priorities have not been picked up in the proposal. In one of the 80 individual reviews this was described as '*dutifully nodding consent to the Government's representatives*'. This may also involve consenting to community commitments that they do not understand. There is a risk of a 'passive participation' phenomenon in this work that would match the 'passive welfare' phenomenon in income support that has been identified as a risk by governments and some people in Indigenous communities.

As articulated in one of the individual reviews, shared responsibility worked best where parties are motivated '*by genuinely shared interests*'. There were examples of combinations of incentives and consequences such as translating a '*no school, no pool*' approach into providing vouchers for the pool if children attended school.

### **Shared responsibility indicators**

This section explores the specific performance indicators of shared responsibility between government and communities demonstrated in the total sample of SRAs reviewed. Earlier in this chapter we have discussed some of the broader indicators of shared responsibility in and between governments. Shared responsibility has the tangible dimensions of quantitative measures which can also link to the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* indicators but there are also less tangible qualitative indicators that are valuable in informing the determination of change and to support the positive outcomes.

For example the SRA agreements have sections on Performance Indicators and Key Milestones for governments, communities and other parties. The performance indicators were found to be mainly such measures as counting attendance, usage of facilities, and the number of programs run. Milestones were about programs commenced, construction completed, and workers engaged. In simple terms these capture quantitative commitments such as school attendance and employment. There are some more qualitative indicators such as 'increased awareness of elders', and 'involvement in the community centre activities' but these are a small minority of the sample of good qualitative indicators. Qualitative indicators are not hard to assess if you use qualitative evaluation methods to measure these such as community feedback, yarning, professional feedback, local and small-scale evaluations, and community meetings.

Many of the 80 individual reviews report a lack of quantitative and qualitative evidence for behaviour change. Reports are frequently limited to providing statistics on number of events and number of participants. The depth and quality of information provided during the site visits demonstrates the importance of hearing these stories and narratives.

With more understanding and development, the quantitative measures can also be about achieving broad goals, for example:

- in addition to measuring the number of workers engaged there could also be a measure of how many community members are engaged in supporting or mentoring the workers to maintain employment
- in addition to school attendance, identifying the proportion of Indigenous students that achieve Year 3 literacy and numeracy would demonstrate more powerful evidence of change
- in addition to measuring attendance at drug awareness programs a measure of the number who successfully complete the program would be valuable
- in addition to identifying the numbers of young people participating in youth activities some indication of the numbers of young people who then progress to leadership training, further education, or employment would provide evidence of broader change.

In these examples the first measure indicates a first step in change but not the progress to, for example, greater awareness, or achievement which would support positive outcomes. The original material on indicators that was provided for ICC Managers and OIPC desk officers is a very useful document for this and it would be valuable to consider a strategy to use this to support ICC staff to take the indicators to the next level of quality to indicate shared responsibility and change.

The use of stories and narratives to collect and articulate the qualitative evidence related to SRAs needs to be developed as part of the monitoring.

In the 80 individual reviews it was also frequently reported that some signatories were not clear on what commitments were to be delivered through the SRA. This led to differences in understanding about SRA components, in expectation of what signatories would contribute, and sometimes higher expectations that would not be met. However in the site visits there were examples of clear understanding and fulfilment of commitments by communities in particular.

**Case study:** In one SRA focussed on economic development, the community had met all of their commitments and the original government partners had met most of their commitments. However mid way through the implementation a new commitment was sought from another Australian Government agency for essential infrastructure costs. This commitment was made at the local level but failed to eventuate for almost 2 years, despite the best efforts of the ICC Manager to speed up the approval process. By the time the funding was approved the other commitments had expired and an economic opportunity is now potentially lost as a private investor has recently moved into the area and looks set to overtake the Indigenous business. The Indigenous community in this SRA is deeply disappointed and frustrated at what they see as ongoing red tape and lack of whole of government commitments in implementing good and innovative business ideas. Many of the government stakeholders involved raised this situation as an example of the big issues which remain a challenge in implementing government commitments.

## 4.4 Forms of partnership

There are overlaps between the elements of partnership and shared responsibility. Some of the dimensions of the relationships and interaction of partnership that we were asked to review we have therefore covered in the previous section.

### *The partners*

The partners involved in the sample of SRAs cover a wide spectrum:

- Australian Government agencies - FaCSIA, the Department of Workplace Relations (DEWR), Attorney General's, and the Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) were major players in terms of funding contributions and number of projects. The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), the Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), the Department of Environment and Water Resources (DEW - formerly Environment and Heritage), and Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS), also participated in a number of SRAs.
- State/Territory Governments – Departments of Aboriginal Affairs/ Indigenous

Affairs, Education and TAFE, Sport and Recreation, Police, Health, and Community Development

- Aboriginal organisations – Aboriginal Corporations, Community Councils, Land Councils, the Aboriginal Benefit Fund, and Indigenous Business Australia
- Local councils
- mainstream organisations – e.g. Royal Life Saving, Lotterywest, schools, health clinics, police, School of the Air
- private enterprise, e.g. a fuel company, environmental health consultants
- professionals - such as artists, recreation officers, youth workers, farmers.

The listing below illustrates that the intention of engaging a wide range of elements of society in SRAs is being implemented and to some extent achieved.

***Examples of projects that engage a wide range of elements of society in SRAs:***

- an alternative wastewater treatment project where a private business played a vital role
- a youth arts and culture program with a rehabilitation focus
- a crab farm which is achieving employment, economic and social goals and has engaged marine scientists
- an environmental clean up team of Indigenous youth where both a local power company and an environment NGO played major roles
- a project to promote traditional culture through art, design and painting with partners across private enterprise, local artists, Australian and State Governments
- a program involving partnerships between five community family support agencies, the Family Court and the Australian Government to employ Indigenous Contact Officers to provide access and information about family law issues
- a project which engages a number of groups (including high school students doing environmental studies, trainees, and elders/Aboriginal people) in being responsible for caring for country projects and for wet tropics heritage area rehabilitation and maintenance programs. They have Shire Council and National Parks contracts for ecological services in other areas - support is also provided by the Chamber of Commerce and other private business organisations
- a rehabilitation centre to be located on private land – a cattle property – in facilities being refurbished and/or built by the local Shire Council, to accommodate and provide services for clientele ordered by the court as part of a sentence for which the state government meets the cost.

These are excellent examples of the diversity of partners involved, however the majority of SRAs involve mostly governments (external to communities) and the predominant roles within SRAs are still played by government agencies and communities.

### ***Partner interaction***

A number of points have been made on the question of interactions between partners in the previous section on shared responsibility. This section reports further on the interaction between government and the communities. Overall SRAs have helped to develop relationships within and external to ICCs.

Several individual reviews reported that communities felt that they were more involved and listened to by the ICC, compared to ATSIC. For example one individual review reported that:

*'...the community felt listened to for the first time since 1988. We have seen more of the ICC in the last 12 months than we saw of ATSIC in the last 12 years'.*

There were of course also communities where this was not the perception. One individual review reported resistance from some community members who were still bitter over the abolition of ATSIC. In some of the site visits the view was expressed that communities that have been overlooked in previous arrangements were receiving attention now.

By contrast the overwhelming impression from the site visits was how positive communities were about the improvement in engagement between governments and communities in the SRA processes. The review team members consistently reported that the community members interviewed supported SRAs, saw government as engaging with them – especially with ongoing ICC support and visits as the SRAs are implemented and they valued government sitting down and listening to them and talking with them. In every community visited for this review, the team was struck by how frequently communities described community meetings, planning sessions and the role of ICC staff in working closely with their community to negotiate the SRA.

Across the SRAs the most common examples of Indigenous involvement are:

- Elders, Community Councils, Indigenous enterprises - managing, monitoring, mentoring
- local community organisations such as schools, health services, women's groups - providing services, expertise, promoting objectives of the SRA, providing use of facilities and equipment, mentoring
- families and individuals, parents and young people – participating, being involved in labour, promoting objectives such as school attendance, skills development to

take a more active role, volunteering for rosters, contributing to user pays cost of services.

**Case Study:** In one community visited during the review issues related to the engagement of women and young people were raised. The Elders wanted their young people involved as they see young people 'stepping up' to leadership roles as important. They also supported more consultation with the women. This was in stark contrast to stories the review team heard from some non-Indigenous stakeholders who argued that women had no leadership or decision-making role in communities. When the review team tested issues related to decision-making and the input of women, with women, they heard strong assertions that women must be consulted and that they were often the leaders in communities including in formal positions. This issue of consulting women was raised in two site visits as a major misunderstanding by many non-Indigenous people and as an ongoing issue for the SRA development process.

### ***The role of the Australian Government***

The Australian Government has been by far the predominant player in the development, implementation and delivery of SRAs. This applies to aspects of staff time, funding and leadership. The Australian Government through the ICCs and the other line agencies were the only partners in many of the SRAs. State or territory government agencies were involved in a significant number but less than half in the sample. Local government bodies were involved with a small number. This means that there is only a very small number that involve all three levels of government.

DEWR contributes through CDEP in about half of the SRAs. Policy changes in CDEP will impact on the delivery of a large number of SRAs and this was raised in several site visits as a current policy initiative which might undermine community confidence that government does talk between its line agencies.

One state government officer interviewed stated that SRAs are an Australian Government initiative and the Australian Government agency will always be coordinator. However one of the emerging questions from a number of people, including an ICC manager, was how to resolve the issue of which agency takes the lead on an SRA once it has been signed. There may be good reasons for another agency to take the lead based on criteria to identify which agency would be appropriate. In Chapter 6: *Lessons learnt*, we suggest criteria for agencies to consider (and to which they could probably add) in exploration of this issue in the next phase of the development of SRAs.

## 4.5 The role of Australian Government officers in ICCs

In earlier assessments reported in this chapter we have commented on the understanding of SRAs. On the basis of the site visits the review team believe that there is a strong understanding emerging in ICCs that the process should not be rushed, that it is better to work carefully and thoroughly and with the community and overall the ICCs are now more comfortable with the process and report better and more achievable results.

Many of the 80 individual reviews reported positively on the role of the ICC and that they met their responsibilities, with comments of '*value added support*', '*enthusiastic*' and '*improved relationships between ICC and the community*'. On the other hand in this sample of 80 SRAs some communities reported that successful SRAs require more regular visits and reinforcement from the ICC (to avoid the assessment by the community that governments '*fund and forget*'), and a clearer understanding of the capacity of the community. These findings from the 80 reviews are consistent with what the review heard in site visits regarding the positive role of the ICC.

The most common issue reported by ICCs during site visits was that SRA involvement can be resource intensive particularly because distances impact on the ability of an ICC to monitor progress and outcomes. They report that the capacity or community development role can be in excess of their obligations under the agreement, and there can be a strong role in reinforcing the goals of the SRA. All ICCs commented on the increased work load from managing so many SRAs and relationships, and expressed concern at how sustainable these work loads were if SRAs continued as a priority. Other comments from ICCs were that there had been some initial scepticism but the development of a number of successful SRAs has made many a '*convert*', and the general consensus was that it has been a positive experience. They appreciate that they are involved in community development or capacity development and bringing about real change. There are reportedly closer working relationships between ICC staff members and overall greater engagement and activity with other agencies.

All ICCs interviewed wanted to maintain SRAs as a core part of their work and support the approach to engaging with communities.

The 80 individual reviews mentioned areas of improvement in relation to planning activities and training. There was a reported need to:

- ensure leadership structures like steering committees have a clear operational plan and a pathway to follow in implementing SRAs
- develop the project management skills of ICC staff
- use mentoring strategies rather than training for '*value adding*' and to '*avoid off the shelf solutions*'.

These findings are consistent with the findings from the site visits.

Summarising the findings from the site visits the review team reported that respondents had consistently identified ICC staff as: *'good at the relationships, listening, being seen, willing to bring people together, going back to community again and again, and have patience balanced with a sense of urgency'*.

### ***Planning and research tools, information and training resources***

The training documents provided for ICC Managers and Deputy Managers, referred to in Chapter 2 on the conceptual framework are the main collection of planning, research and training tools examined in this review. They are reportedly very useful but it seems that they are not as widely understood or known in the ICCs as might be expected. These documents are from OIPC (prior to 2006) and FaCSIA (since the 2006 restructure) and we have not examined any documents from the other Australian Government agencies so we cannot comment on their quality. One of the ICCs visited reported developing their own planning and monitoring tools.

In relation to information and training it was very apparent during the site visits that there is a high level of experience amongst staff in ICCs and that ICC Managers and Deputy Managers are leading development of staff in their office, sometimes through on-the-job development in team workshops and mentoring within the team. NSW FaCSIA recently held a conference for Solution Brokers from all agencies and we understand this is or will be occurring in other states and territories. The OIPC section of the FaCSIA Annual Report 2005-06 reports as a key achievement building skills in the ICC network in the negotiation of mutual obligation, improving the quality of performance information reflected in SRAs, and developing implementation tools. This is probably referring to the documentation, workshops and meetings we have mentioned in the exploration in Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework.

In one ICC site visit the need for better systems support and training in relation to the GMS (Grants Management System) and the information system AMIS and more general information technology (e.g. email) was raised. It was also suggested that it would be valuable for more departments to be using the GMS.

## 5. Funding and resources

In interviews with respondents from several Australia Government agencies, including ICCs, there was a confusing picture about the funding available for SRAs. This was partly because the names of budget initiatives for programs have changed over time and partly because the terms 'flexible funding' and 'flexible funding pool' were both used to refer to a number of elements of the funding. With the turnover of staff within OIPC and the changes to the structure involving the transition to FaCSIA generally, the understanding of the evolution of arrangements has diminished and there were different understandings of their delegations reported to us by ICC Managers.

With key information from the OIPC staff interviewed, other respondent interviews, and examining the available documentation, we have gathered that the types of funding and resources available for SRAs are the following:

- the SRAIAP
- Cross agency flexible funding pool
- Flexible funding within the programs of the Australian Government agencies
- Program funding of the Australian Government agencies
- Funding from State Governments
- Funding from Local Government
- Staff time and other resources from all levels of government
- Other in-kind resources.

For the 2004-05 Australian Government Budget a flexible funding pool had been drawn together across Australian Government agencies. This funding pool was given the title of the SRAIAP and in the 2005-06 Budget \$85.9 million was committed over four years. In the year 2005/2006 the amount of funding available was \$ 23.1 million<sup>21</sup>. This is a significant step towards addressing funding silos and created new opportunities for flexibility at the local and regional level on a significant scale.

The OIPC section of the FaCSIA Annual Report of 2005-06 refers to the SRAIAP providing '*flexible on-the-ground support for the development and implementation of SRAs*' and some other interventions<sup>22</sup>. Funding in the SRAIAP is not for initiatives that departmental programs could cover but for activities to assist in developing SRAs - for example funding community workshops and forums; projects to strengthen community governance arrangements to support an SRA; or developing access to mainstream services. Initially the

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<sup>21</sup> Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs Bulletin no 2 May 2005, *The Budget* p4

<sup>22</sup> FaCSIA *Annual Report 2005-06 Outcome 6 Innovative whole-of-government* Canberra 2006.

ICC Managers did not have any delegation to approve money from the SRAIAP funds but a delegation to approve funds to \$100,000 was introduced in October 2006.

## Funding across levels of government

For the 80 SRAs which were individually reviewed, state and territory governments contributed \$3.4m and local government almost \$1m, compared with \$18.3m from the Australian Government (Figures are based on the 71 SRA agreements available from the agreements located on the web for the 80 SRAs reviewed. Note: these figures measure 'intentions' agreement). Local Government contributions were most often 'in-kind' e.g. development officers and/or use of facilities, and are not translated into dollar equivalents.

These figures confirm the point made earlier that the Australian Government clearly plays a critical role in SRAs.

The breakdown of funding for the 80 individually reviewed SRAs by funding body was:

OIPC	\$10.3m
Other Australian Government	\$ 8.0m (of which FaCSIA is \$4.5m)
State Depts of Indigenous Affairs	\$ 1.9m (of which \$1.5m is in WA)
Other State government agencies	\$ 1.5m
Local Government	\$ 0.9m
Other organisations	\$ 1.9m (\$0.9m Indigenous Business Australia)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$24.6m</b>

The breakdown of the funding of these SRAs by state or territory is summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Allocation of funding to 80 SRAs individually reviewed**

State	Total \$	No of SRAs	Average \$	Median \$	Range \$
WA	\$14.26m	27	528,000	125,000	10,000 - \$3m
NT	\$ 6.5m	24	297,000	165,000	15,000 - \$1.4m
NSW	\$ 1.98m	14	141,000	65,000	48,000 – 567,000
Qld	\$ 1.15m	9	193,000	169,000	48,000 – 270,000
SA	\$ 0.67m	5	135,000	72,000	5,000 – 450,000

Note: NT – 2 SRA agreements not available, not included in average,

Qld – (\$ for 6 only. 3 not included: (1 in-kind only, 2 agreements not available)

The quantum of funding was not the issue concerning most respondents. The issues of greatest concern were:

- mobilising the resources - i.e. getting funding agreements finalised for funding that had been agreed in principle in the negotiations and signing of SRAs

- securing through negotiation the range of funding from a number of potential partners to put together responsive and flexible packages for SRAs that could ‘make a difference’, ‘be a circuit breaker’, ‘be a strategic intervention’.

In one ICC visited the SRAIAP funding was being well used, particularly to support the development of a comprehensive SRA.

The OIPC section of the FaCSIA Annual Report 2005-06 reported in relation to SRAs that:

*‘The largest Australian Government investment was provided to agreements focussed on community development, school attendance and education, and training and employment, consistent with the three national priorities identified by the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs’<sup>23</sup>.*

Further reporting in the Annual Report refers to 180 SRA projects having:

*‘... harnessed mainstream funds including investment in SRAs, in the order of \$26.3 million from all Australian Government agencies (including \$8.5million from OIPC). This is in addition to \$4.9 million from state and territory governments, \$1 million from local government and \$1 million from corporate and non-government sectors’<sup>24</sup>.*

## Funding mechanisms

It is difficult to assess the comparative effort to implement an SRA as opposed to developing other funding arrangements on the information available except note that:

- the flexible approach to funding and accessing a range of funding is seen as a positive development by government agencies and communities
- the funding agreement arrangements have in many ways not changed in many ICCs because the funding agreements are still subject to the usual funding agreement process
- in some ICCs and other agencies work is being progressed to achieve a single funding agreement and there are some single funding agreements in place for SRAs - in the case of one single funding agreement for a total of \$1m, respondents said that they ‘*would not have got there without an SRA*’
- single funding agreements may take more time to negotiate but could streamline reporting and monitoring and therefore probably balancing out over time
- the workload on ICCs appears to be significant as they are spending

<sup>23</sup> FaCSIA *Annual Report 2005-06 Outcome 6 Innovative whole-of-government* Canberra 2006. p 240

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p 252

considerable time coordinating and liaising with other line agencies and levels of government regarding funding, trying to simplify funding agreements, and in some cases negotiating shared indicators and a single reporting format and process. There is also the workload to keep up to date with programs and funding.

## **The quest for a single funding agreement**

This issue of a single funding agreement would be significantly addressed and improved if all Australian Government line agencies were encouraged and supported to work collaboratively on achieving a single agreement. Some of the positive examples could be used as templates or models. A COAG commitment by State/Territory Ministers to support the same level of flexibility at the line agency level could foster new and innovative answers to this longstanding and challenging issue. It would also be a test of the genuineness to work collaboratively across governments, and assist in building community confidence that all governments are serious about reducing red tape and to focusing on outcomes for communities.

The two most commonly raised issues in relation to funding were

- the disconnect between the SRA and the delivery of funding
- the need for the ICC Manager to have significantly more ability and authority to commit funds, and therefore more delegations.

The disconnect between SRAs and funding occurs because of the continuing use of separate funding agreements which are not completed concurrently with the SRA but have to go through the usual departmental channels. This is despite the significant emphasis on the commitment of benefits in return for which communities will make commitments to behaviour change. It is also despite the importance of flexibility and promptness of funding to the SRA concept and process. The delays in funding were reported to have put some SRAs at risk and, in one case, to have put commercially viable ideas at risk of being '*stolen by private sector opportunists*'. There is a possibility that this particular project should have been considered for Indigenous Business Australia or a venture capital loan and this indicates that knowing enough about the complexity of funding can be a challenge for ICCs.

## **ICC delegations**

It was reported that while ICC Managers have the delegation for funding under the SRAIAP they do not have delegation for FaCSIA flexible program funds. Many respondents argued for the ICC Manager to have delegation for larger amounts of money and to be able to have delegations in relation to funding through the agencies in the ICC. The frustration regarding

funding approval has direct implications for the delegations to ICC Managers. However we are also aware that the issue of approval of funds managed by another agency may not be easily resolved. We suggest that discussions be held in two or three jurisdictions with experienced ICC Managers and State Managers of Australian Government agencies to develop proposals for improving the funding approval processes across agencies and delegations for ICC Managers. These proposals could be referred to other jurisdictions for comment and to the Secretaries' Group leading to implementation of changes nationally.

The impetus for some SRAs came from project proposals seeking funds from other sources (e.g. proposal to DEST for funding to increase literacy through provision of reading and IT resources). In other cases Australian and state/territory governments provided program funds and the SRA process allowed broader objectives to be addressed through additional funding from government and non-government partners.

However there are problems of sustainability for which ICCs need to negotiate strategies to address funds that are needed on an ongoing basis to continue program or service delivery. It was very frequently reported that successful projects were concerned about the impact on the community if projects cannot continue because of lack of ongoing funding. This is a concern because the nature of funding for SRAs was not to be primarily for ongoing funding for any one project under an SRA. This issue may need some more exploration to understand whether the concern is in fact about ongoing funding for projects for the community rather than for any one project.

## **Sustainability and funding**

Sustainability was addressed in some projects by considering:

- whether funds can be raised to contribute to resourcing or self-sufficiency e.g. some projects were working on fees that are affordable, yet sufficient to contribute to maintenance/replacement e.g. pool entry, bus fares
- revenue raising e.g. incorporating a mail service into a bus run.

## **In-kind contributions**

'In-kind' support is predominantly the redirection of existing resources to SRA projects; with some new resources. They are usually not of high dollar value but can make a significant difference. They mobilise other resources, facilitate wider interest and involvement in a community, and can add value but mostly do not add much in the way of additional resources.

Partners providing 'in-kind' support range across the 3 spheres of government, Indigenous

organisations, mainstream community organisations, private enterprise, and individual professionals. Examples include:

- project management – participation in project monitoring, an engineer to oversee construction
- professionals – evaluation of health outcomes
- workers - project officers, youth worker, police for blue light activities
- training - police training for transport marshals
- transport - making a vehicle available for activities and contributing to running and maintenance costs
- venues for activities
- technical support
- labour and materials for a 'clean up'.

Provision of CDEP workers is listed in SRA agreements as 'in-kind' contributions by DEWR. These workers are drawn from existing CDEP allocations. CDEP workers were an important source of labour in about half of the SRAs and as previously mentioned the policy changes to CDEP will have an impact on some SRAs. In one of the SRAs examined in the site visits the potential withdrawal of CDEP will seriously undermine the SRA goals unless a short term solution can be found. In this SRA the issue regarding the delays in funding from a major government partner has reduced the time the project has to establish a viable and more sustainable business which would have created genuine jobs for the current CDEP participants.

The situation in relation to funding was summed up by a senior manager who said

*' the main changes needed now in SRAs relate to funding agreements'.*

## 6. Lessons learnt - what's working and what could be done better

As we have reported in the previous chapter of this report, SRAs were viewed positively by most of the respondents to this review, particularly the community members. SRAs seem to be accepted by ICC staff, many other Australian Government line agencies and state and territory government agencies – they were reported as providing:

*'a road map and a means to bring funding arrangements together and then progress them'.*

They appear to have made an important contribution, particularly at the local level, to the new approach to working with Indigenous communities, families, and individuals based on the shared responsibility and mutual obligation policies that have been developing since 2000. The new assumptions about reciprocity, shared responsibility and *'the right to take responsibility'*<sup>25</sup> have been introduced and tested at the local level through the implementation of SRAs. From the experiences to date there are important lessons the implementation of SRAs. This is not to imply that SRAs do not attract some criticism and some cynicism and we have addressed these at length.

### ***Lessons identified by ICC Managers and staff***

The main lessons identified by ICC Managers have been:

- maintaining the strategic overview/focus/vision through the process or there is a real risk of being side-tracked and losing focus, or allowing 'program' requirements to change the initial community requirements. This is particularly the role of the ICC Manager and is especially important when there are many partners and funding approval delays in the process to fund. *'There can be a pressure to make the proposal fit the funding'.*
- undertaking deeper analysis of the capabilities of organisations involved – both to manage projects and complete undertakings (eg. building capability to do renovations for some projects, building project management capability in another). However this must be balanced with an understanding that those organisations with the least capability are often the most in need of improved outcomes - the answer is often patience, monitoring, and initial intensive support.
- including the funding for a project officer in some SRAs - this is particularly important if the SRA is large and complex - the person could be a member of the community who is being trained and supported.

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<sup>25</sup> This is the title of a book by Noel Pearson see <http://www.brisinst.org.au/pdf/pearsonbook.pdf>

- clearly identifying who needs to be included in initial discussions or at least formally recognised as partners to the SRA. For example the matters of land ownership and the right to use the land became an issue in one community
- some individuals involved in negotiations can wear many hats and to avoid confusion and omissions it is important to identify:
  - who they are speaking as/representing
  - whether they are *not* representing one of their hats (may be not thinking about it) and therefore possibilities are being missed or complications arise
- being realistic both in expectations and time, including flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances/issues as they arise
- committed individuals are important, both in the ICC and in the community, but strategies are needed to manage the positive and negative dimensions because otherwise the loss of such an individual can seriously undermine the success of the project. The reality needs to be recognised and addressed in two ways - encourage and support those individuals but ensure that robust processes, in particular a 'paper trail' are put in place to manage the risk of their departure, and secondly include succession planning in the SRA
- explore strategies to retain staff in communities to build experience and consistency in SRA processes
- refining funding approval mechanisms for SRAs otherwise they can be delayed as a result of one agency not playing their part in a timely way – perhaps better integration of the approval process for SRA and for funding so that once the SRA is approved the funding approval is a simple administrative process
- greater delegation for ICC managers to approve flexible funding both from FaCSIA and non-FaCSIA program areas, where directly involved in the SRA. *'We need to try to find ways to simplify and clarify the funding'*
- developing strategies to identify, train and retain key government staff who are involved in SRA development processes and continue to develop a more flexible, multi- skilled approach that allows for greater depth in staffing support - skilled individuals are key in this process
- the funding of community/capacity development officers/community facilitators in communities through the SRAIAP to support some communities to develop the skills to negotiate and implement their SRA:
  - 'Some of the negotiations and processes have apparently become quite confronting for some groups – especially for communities who are not used to having to manage such processes themselves. Can't expect to just drop in money, do nothing else and expect outcomes'*

### ***Lessons from the individual reviews***

The observations above are confirmed in the individual reviews. For example key lessons included:

- the need for a clear knowledge of objectives and full ownership of the SRA
- an SRA needs to reflect realistic capacity of the community
- better project management and implementation planning is needed
- sufficient time for community consultations and to involve community Elders.

Other significant lessons from the individual reviews were:

- some SRAs need a longer timeframe - some as much as 5 -10 years
- there needs to be a clear outline of responsibilities for implementation
- some Community Council members need development in governance and leadership - *some of the members felt left out and unable to resolve delays*
- It is well understood that it is important to avoid negotiating an SRA at times of high disruption in communities but this is worth repeating here.

The need for governance and leadership training could also be supported through the ORAC (Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations) and OIPC initiatives directed at improving skills in these areas. This support could in fact form part of an SRA.

### ***Further lessons identified by other respondents and the review team***

Further lessons learnt mentioned by respondents or the result of the research and observations of the review team were:

- genuine, clear and broadly based community commitment has been vital in allowing SRAs to survive when delays and frustrations occur
- relationships and community engagement between government and communities are critical and ICCs have played an important role in fostering these
- communities had a better understanding of government staff and saw them more as *'real people who would not just come and go but would work alongside us'*
- the need for project officer, project management and community development support was frequently raised and the potential to provide training and employment for community members was a key point
- the need for better measurement of outcomes, but these need to be realistic about what is achievable given the skills and resources – so aiming for 'good enough' measuring of outcomes, baseline data and performance indicators rather than 'high sophistication' is proposed
- practical, time related milestones would be valuable for implementation planning -

indicators of where the project will be in 3 months, in 6 months, in 12 months would help communities understand progress on change and process outcomes

- agencies need to remember that it is **shared** responsibility in relation to a number of dimensions. The agency has as much responsibility for the process as the communities, so must deliver, assist, monitor and be prepared to help when the process gets stuck. This general reminder to agencies from community members came up a number of times during site visits
- monitoring and reporting are often seen as a role for government only but it would be in keeping with the intent of the SRAs for there to be formal joint monitoring between the government and the community, or monitoring by the community of both the implementation of their own commitments and the commitments of government. Support to develop and carry out this role would be an appropriate community capability building dimension to an SRA
- focusing on fewer mutual obligations and prioritising these so that key obligations are understood and met might reduce cynicism and foster stronger mutual accountability.

### ***The concept and role of a lead agency***

A 'sleeper' issue in the SRA development process has been the development of the idea of a lead agency to monitor and accept coordination action when the process needs unsticking.

It was a sleeper issue in that this role was not envisaged or articulated in the background documentation and therefore it is not clear how it is developing as an element of the model.

This is a fundamental of good governance – i.e. to have clarity of responsibility for implementation of an initiative. The role does not necessarily have to be FaCSIA or the agency contributing most of the funds. The role should perhaps be an ICC agency although a state/territory government agency could also play this role as long as it is clear who plays this role and what the role entails.

Criteria to assist the agencies involved to agree on which agency would be appropriate to lead implementation could include assessing and agreeing:

- which government agency has primary policy responsibility for the issue being addressed – is this clear and if so would that agency be better placed to take a lead agency role?
- what would the lead agency role be for – monitoring progress or expenditure, maintaining links with the key community partners, fostering and facilitating collaboration across agencies and with the community, or linking to the mainstream?
- which Minister has the capacity to influence longer term changes if these are

required?

- how many levels of government are involved and which agency do they support playing the lead agency role and what is that role?
- In a whole of government context which agency is best placed to lead the initiative?

If it was decided that for some reason the lead agency would change for different stages of a project this would need to be managed carefully.

So far we would identify the lead agency role to be:

- coordination of partners and major elements of the SRA
- following through when there are problems and negotiating resolution
- supporting the ICC Manager to deal with and address barriers (where the ICC is not the lead agency)
- keeping engagement up and the process moving - i.e. facilitative leadership
- a point of contact for the community to address matters outside the control of any individual agency or partner and to ensure monitoring and feedback is ongoing.

The individual reviews highlighted a number of areas for deliberation at the SRA planning and agreement stages which are crucial for success in delivering SRA objectives:

- assessing the degree of reliance on skills and ensure that these are in place, e.g. governance, literacy
- key infrastructure needs to be sound and accessible and funding for maintenance considered
- ability to meet regulations as a crucial determinant of success – e.g. an operation planned for a day care program was outside Day Care regulations.

It is noteworthy that unexpected benefits arose from the SRAs even where very few objectives were delivered – e.g. a respondent reported that '*out of failure comes the resolve to rethink and follow other approaches*'.

### ***Barriers, challenges and areas for improvement***

Barriers, challenges and areas for improvements that have been identified during this review are:

- Where there has been significant turnover of staff in ICCs the processes can take a long time because of gaps where there is no-one available or because new staff may not be familiar with SRA processes. However it is important to note that in at least one ICC, it was reported that there has been a good retention of staff.

- There needs to be consideration of what is a realistic number of SRAs for an ICC to manage – this was a key challenge for one ICC interviewed and we believe this may well be an issue across the ICC network. However this was raised in the context of the original targets that had been set which were seen as unrealistic by some ICC staff - especially where there were distances to travel to visit communities both in the development process and the implementation and monitoring. The issue of whether these target numbers still apply needs to be addressed and resolved<sup>26</sup>.
- It was found that in some small SRAs, with one community signatory or a small number of families, other sections of the community may believe that they are missing out. However this may provide leverage for developing another SRA with that group - this has the probable advantage of increased interest in developing family or clan SRAs as a first step to engaging other families or clans.
- The 80 individual reviews noted the need for:
  - quantifiable performance indicators and key milestones
  - baseline data to be collected
  - performance indicators in the area of financial management
  - more knowledge of the mechanisms and resources required to measure behavioural outcomes.
- Inadequate assessment of costs and time involved in making infrastructure operational may jeopardise projects.

The most frequently reported reason why an SRA could not deliver outcomes was high turnover of personnel across the signatories of the SRA, and the managers and workers in the projects. This risk came from the resulting loss of understanding and commitment to the SRA. Government signatories were more likely to move on than were community members. Less frequently mentioned, but also an issue was the lack of appropriate skills and/or inability to recruit people with appropriate skills to government and community organisations.

Financial constraints rarely seemed to jeopardise the delivery of the SRA, but the following issues were reported to limit the success or the scope of the project:

- heavy reliance on 'in-kind' CDEP workers
- lack of provision for contingencies such as escalating costs due to delays.

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<sup>26</sup> This feedback came from a very experienced ICC Manager. It was difficult for the review team to determine the status of this target as there are no longer any of the original staff left in the original OIPC unit when SRAs were introduced.

### ***Engaging the community***

SRAs were successful or on track where:

- the process is driven by the community and they feel they have a say rather than obligations imposed
- the Community Council or other community representatives have a strong, representative grasp on the community's aspirations
- the central participants are consulted, including young people
- community consultations are well promoted: eg. well advertised, *'throw in a BBQ'*
- effort is directed to community capacity building
- a successful SRA led to further cooperation between partners and generated interest from other communities to run similar programs
- training was provided in meeting practices and procedures where required
- contingency plans were developed with communities for when targets are delayed or not met.

Conversely, it is sometimes difficult to engage a community where there are few formal structures, e.g. a community council, a resource centre.

### ***Achievements and difficulties***

Some of the individual reviews provided a judgement on the level of success of the SRA they were reviewing. Where this was not reported, in our analysis we created a success rating based on the extent to which stated objectives were delivered and the satisfaction of the key players. Analysis of the reported success of the 80 SRAs shows that a significant proportion were 'very successful' – i.e. all objectives were delivered to an acceptable degree, and the community sees the SRA as successful with significant community benefit. A larger proportion were 'generally successful' - in that key objectives were met, with some others only partially met, and the community was satisfied with the achievements. The largest group were 'somewhat successful' where some key objectives were met, others were not achieved or were still in progress, or successes were not maintained. Only a small proportion had only minimal success.

In every site visit the review team heard consistently, from both community and government stakeholders, that one of the improvements they would like to see was more realistic outcomes being negotiated. As one community member summed this up *'if we are all agreed about what we can achieve then we are more likely to support each other and our community is less likely to be disappointed'*. And a government stakeholder said when asked what he would do differently said: *'I would focus on one or two changes we all thought it was possible to achieve.'*

In the analysis of the 80 individual reviews several felt that lack of delegation of decision making to the local ICC affected reaching agreement and delivering SRAs. The introduction of the delegation for ICC Managers to an amount of \$100,000 for projects to support the development of SRAs is seen as valuable in demonstrating commitment by government, and mobilising action quickly.

The other aspect of local delegation affects the delivery of funding commitments as part of the negotiation and signing process and in follow through. SRAs cannot commit funds - this happens through funding agreements, which have not always been implemented. This has been canvassed thoroughly in the previous chapter. The relationship between the SRAs and funding is a difficult one and is at the heart of some of the systemic reform that still needs to be delivered. As discussed in the chapter on the conceptual framework tangible benefit is one of the elements of the framework. This was also a strong theme in the site visits too. The link between an SRA and delivery of funding needs to be improved.

Delays in the implementation of the SRA on time was a major theme across many of SRAs that were judged to be only somewhat successful at the time of the review. Reasons for slippage include:

- delays in promised funding
- key infrastructure not in place
- turnover of key personnel
- difficulty in engaging workers (e.g. CDEP workers diverted to other projects).

Even though improvements in health and lifestyle, and reduction in crime and drug and alcohol usage were very high in the stated aims for SRAs these were less often asserted as outcomes given the problems of measurement.

However there were important sustainable benefits that were frequently reported:

- capacity building at organisational and individual levels
- governance and administration skills for Community Councils and organisations
- skills, qualifications and work experience to enhance employment for individuals, and/or develops young people as future leaders
- gains from improved interagency co-operation and understanding - new connections, minimising duplication, improvement in partner services through contact with SRA workers.

**Conclusion**

In summary it is important to note that SRAs are well supported; have contributed to a new paradigm in working with communities and of expectations of both government and communities; built good faith; and are reported to be achieving outcomes. A number of lessons and some characteristics of successful SRAs have been identified. The barriers and challenges are not huge but there are some important challenges related to the delivery of funding to support an SRA. The review team is of the view that SRAs are becoming better established as a tool for the new policy approaches that the Australian and State and Territory Governments have been pursuing since 2000. The next phase needs to focus on clarification of the model, further support to communities and government officers and avoiding any tendency for a rigidity of approach to develop. Flexibility and responsiveness are still key goals for success and to keep the development moving. Maintaining the flexibility whilst building good practice will require careful thought and conceptualising guidelines as a code of practice may assist in achieving this goal.

## 7. Future options

In the discussions about this review many people have commented on the need to work with Indigenous communities generally and have observed that the SRA process has much to teach governments about how to progress reforms related to addressing complex issues in Indigenous communities. There is a clear implication of the community engagement experience of the SRAs since trust and increased engagement with commitments on both sides - government and community - have resulted in:

- positive responses to SRAs and the way of working on which they are based
- local communities feeling like they are listened to, engaged in the solutions, and respected
- an interest in many communities in moving on to the next challenge.

Therefore SRAs are showing a way forward on community engagement and that shared responsibility is a viable policy. Those involved in the hands on work in communities and governments have said that it will be:

- *'important not to lose the vision'*
- *'we need to keep revisiting what we are trying to achieve so everyone stays motivated when things come up'*.
- *'Don't get distracted by problems, instead see them as issues that make us refocus on what we need to do'*.

The SRA tool as it stands needs little improvement as a tool to '**facilitate genuine community engagement**'. To maintain the engagement/interest and faith of the community requires good intentions as well as good practice on all sides.

The previous chapter on lessons learnt covers a number of issues and improvements but the main issues for future development for SRAs relate to:

- better coordination and delivery of the **funding** that is the most tangible benefit to communities flowing from an SRA and on which mutual obligation is predicated – the **single funding agreement** must be the priority for the next phase
- support for the pivotal **role of ICCs and the ICC Manager** as the driver of quality and development
- improvement of the **joint governance and management by the ICC and the community**, of the initiatives that result from an SRA - this includes joint monitoring and clarification and effective implementation of the lead agency role
- clarification of the **time frame and role of SRAs as the overarching agreement within which a series of projects may be funded over time** - addressing the circumstances of Indigenous communities may need a five to ten year timeframe

and commitment. The renegotiation and development of the SRA could occur over time to accommodate changes required

- reinforcement to government officers that the **shared** responsibility of SRAs needs to be honoured more clearly, for example in more joint processes of project monitoring or supporting community to train and support community members to undertake this work
- both community and government stakeholders would like to see **more realistic and fewer outcomes** being negotiated and agreed to underpin parties supporting each other - across the community and government.

Addressing the issues in relation to **delivering funding** relates to:

- the disconnect between the SRA and the delivery of funding
- the need for the ICC Manager to have significantly more ability to commit and mobilise funds across agencies, and therefore more delegations to overcome the barriers to integrated responses.

The review team supports the view that being part of an SRA and going through all the necessary groundwork should fast track funding commitments for all agencies involved. There is a much higher likelihood of success when a community goes through these consultation processes (unlike other ways of procuring funding) so risk management issues and other factors that often delay funding decisions should take this into account. Again **the single funding agreement** is core to this goal.

There is some evidence that larger more **comprehensive SRAs** will become more numerous. It is possible that both forms of comprehensive SRAs explored in section 4.2 of this report will develop further. That is those designed to support communities that have holistic community plans; and those comprehensive SRAs that link individual benefit and individual behaviour addressing large macro level change such as housing, home ownership, tenancy, welfare and income management, and development of an economic base.

**Harnessing the mainstream** seems to be receiving more attention in some locations in the last twelve months, particularly in the more urban communities. This will be a valuable move if the main emphasis is on improving access and supporting the complementarity of indigenous specific services and mainstream services. There is an important difference between harnessing the mainstream to improve the mainstream responsibilities of government and other services in this way, and a policy of 'mainstreaming' which leads to the precipitous removal of Indigenous specific services.

To date the **role of the Australian Government** has been predominant in the development of SRAs. While state/territory government officers seem to work with this situation there may

be the potential for more state and territory government initiatives to become an SRA with the incorporation of funding from Australian Government agencies. One of the main sensitivities in such situations might be recognition of the state/territory government role as initiator and as the lead agency on an ongoing basis. Rather than parallel developments where there are state/territory initiatives in a community alongside an SRA or SRAs that are predominantly funded through ICC agencies, relating these projects to an overarching SRA and implementing in this way inclusive **intergovernmental partnerships** will add strength to the policy of shared responsibility.

Support for the ICCs should involve revisiting the **support and training of staff in ICCs** and organising to update, to present more formally (as in a manual) and disseminate the background materials that have been developed particularly for the ICC Manager Recalls/workshops. In the context of this training and support for staff, work needs to be undertaken on the need for *better measurement of outcomes and realistic indicators*. This developmental work should aim for 'good enough' measuring of outcomes, baseline data and performance indicators rather than 'high sophistication'. Joint training across Australian Government agencies on whole of government approaches would greatly assist ICC Managers and agency staff in implementing SRAs.

The Australian Government has invested in developing resources and initiatives to support improved **whole of government work** and ICC managers need to drive this process in the ICC. Because of the nature of the work of the ICC staff in relation to SRAs, development of skills for and understanding of this governmental strategy is particularly powerful in the hands on work of negotiation and joint 'design' of SRAs within the ICC. An action learning approach, where there is regular reflection on the process of multi-agency work in SRA development, is a powerful methodology and it was apparent that this is happening in some ICCs. This regular engagement and reflection needs to be between government agencies within and outside the ICCs.

Matching the need for support and training for staff is the need for more **governance and leadership development for communities**. One aspect of governance is good project management and capacity building and there are important opportunities for joint development of skills and knowledge on these matters for ICC staff and community members. Undertaking deeper analysis of the capabilities of organisations involved – both to manage projects and complete undertakings - would be assisted by the funding of **project managers** for implementation and project officers for capability and capacity building where appropriate.

Clarification of **the role of lead agency** is needed to show clearly how this strategy and role can contribute to a whole of government approach. The role of lead agency needs to be specifically included in the documentation and training for the model. Associated with strengthening of the lead agency role would be increased clarity of all roles in

implementation after the SRA has been signed. Addressing the criteria and role for lead agencies proposed in Chapter 6 of this report may assist this process.

ICC staff and community members were concerned about managing the impact of the turnover of ICC staff on the progress of an SRA and the maintenance of achievements over time. In order to do this Managers believed that it is vital to maintain *effective 'paper trails' and documentation of undertakings over time* in order to hold on to what was originally intended as time goes by, the people involved change and the funding available changes too.

In working on these improvements to SRAs as a tool it will be important to ***continue to take the risk of setting the direction but allowing the approach to evolve*** and maintaining the flexibility and responsiveness that is needed, rather than tending to see elements as fixed and thereby resulting in a rigidity of approach. It will be important to establish what level of formality in the approach and of documentation are required now to build on the lessons learned and to support future SRAs without constraining the development of implementation practice. Using the ***concept and language of a code of practice*** may reduce any tendency to be too prescriptive or to introduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

The implementation of SRAs may need to take a major step, for example in moving to macro level issues and linking individual benefit rather than community benefit to behaviour change, but this should not be presented as a change of direction/a new model but rather an evolution of the SRA approach. This is advisable because many communities, and government officers, commented on the constant change of direction and models by government particularly when maintaining an approach that is showing results and developing for example a second generation model would indicate a constancy of direction and commitment. SRAs are an example of this opportunity and must not become just another good idea which was tried and then put aside.

Thus we have titled this report 'Don't let's lose another good idea' as a reflection of the concern that, just as the evidence is emerging that something is working well, there will be a repeat of the old pattern of dispensing with a good initiative and trying something new.

## 8. References and websites

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner *Social Justice Report 2006* Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC), Canberra 2007

Documents provided by Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination in FaCSIA

FaCSIA *SRA IAP Interim Operations Manual for STOs and ICCs*. October 2006

FaCSIA *Annual Report 2005-06 Outcome 6 Innovative whole-of-government* Canberra 2006

OIPC Indigenous Coordination Centre *Shared Responsibility and Strategic Investment (undated)*

Noel Pearson *The right to take responsibility* <http://www.brisinst.org.au/pdf/pearsonbook.pdf>

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2003, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, Productivity Commission Canberra

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Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs, *Annual Report 2005-06*, Australian Government 2006

[www.indigenous.gov.au/sra\\_info.html](http://www.indigenous.gov.au/sra_info.html)

## Attachment 1: Information provided to respondents about the interviews

### 1. Information for communities

Morgan Disney has been contracted by the Australian Government to do a review of the way Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) have been implemented across Australia. We are based in Canberra and have over 30 years' experience working in health and community services. We also employ two Indigenous consultants, Tracey Whetnall and Benny Hodges who work closely with us regarding our work in Indigenous projects and communities. Tracey and Benny have worked with us for several years. Indigenous consultant Sharon Payne also will join us for this project. We will be visiting Cairns and Coffs Harbour, along with the NT; these three areas have been identified as good places to talk to communities and government agencies about how SRAs have been implemented. We want to hear from community members and organisations about how well the SRAs have gone and how well communities have been involved in developing SRAs.

Some of the things we want to talk with you about are:

- Who initiated the discussions about the SRA and what did you hope might happen or would change for your community as a result of the SRA?
- What support did you get during the development of the SRA from the ICC and anyone else?
- Who signed the SRA and did they have full/some community support?
- What if anything worried you about the SRA while it was being developed?
- How long did it take to get agreement to the SRA?
- Did all of the partners from government do what they said they would do?
- What were you/your community expected to do and how well were you/your community able to do that?
- Were you involved at all in any discussions about how it was going?
- Who else was involved and how did they all behave towards you and your community?
- How has this SRA helped your community and what did you/your community learn from doing this SRA?
- Would you do another SRA and if you would what you do differently?
- What would you hope the ICC and anyone else would do differently in another SRA?

## **2. Information for government and other partners to SRAs - including the staff of ICCs**

We want to explore the following issues with government agencies and other partners - (this is not the actual interview schedule):

- How the SRA came about, who initiated and who drove it?
- The partners to the agreement - how this was agreed, how did it work?
- What was in it for your agency – why did your agency agree to participate?
- The desired/expected outcomes from your agency's perspective?
- Readiness/support for engaging in the SRA process – government and community (ICC role, skills, knowledge, training etc)
- The concept of shared responsibility
- Role of the ICC based staff and their own agency including Central Office
- Funding/resourcing - how this was agreed, implemented?
- Monitoring and evaluating outcomes – how was this to happen and what did happen?
- Perceptions of the community's engagement/involvement and what they think of SRAs
- In-kind support – what is it and how did this work (if relevant)?
- Achievements, unanticipated outcomes/consequences
- Barriers and issues – including solutions
- Lessons learned, what could be/will be different in future SRAs?
- Starting again – what would you do differently?
- Any other observations/comments on implementation from their perspective

## **3. Additional questions for ICC Managers**

- What has been your overall experience of SRAs from commencement to now - what's changed?
- What have been some of the most important lessons from the process to date from your perspective?
- How well prepared and supported have you been overall in the implementation process - what would have helped and what will help in the future?
- What have been the features of those SRAs which have been better negotiated and/or more successfully implemented?
- What has the SRA process meant for your office?
- What are the 2-3 key messages you would like us to take from this review of SRAs from your perspective?

## Attachment 2: A detailed case study

### Case study no 1: Several SRAs in a larger size remote community

This larger remote community has signed three SRAs, one for a community facility, one for a small arts complex, and the third a larger and more complex set of services related to health and wellbeing and involving the building of a facility to deliver wellbeing and recreational activities for all young people. The population is in excess of 4,000 people and this includes some outlying areas with very small populations. The SRAs for the community facility and arts complex are complete and the SRA for the well being facility and services is signed and being implemented. This community has several large Indigenous NGOs in the community.

The SRA process for all three SRAs is contentious with some of the NGOs and several non-Indigenous staff working in the NGOs expressing strong concern to the SRA review team that they did not support SRAs. They argued that the community did not fully understand what it was agreeing to in signing them and are opposed to one of the initiatives in particular. Other non-Indigenous staff did support them and at least one of the NGOs had undertaken a survey of adults in the community to see how they felt about SRAs and found a high level of support for the SRAs. Hence this CEO had decided that the organisation must support what the community wanted irrespective of any personal views held by staff. The larger SRA has funding in excess of \$3m allocated across seven government agencies - four Australian Government and three state government.

In the case of each SRA, the ICC staff raised the option of using an SRA with the community to address the issues the community wanted to see addressed and the community leaders agreed. The planning and development for the health and wellbeing SRA had involved numerous community meetings and workshops, regular visits of two to three days at a time by at least two Solution Brokers for over a year, and numerous meetings with individuals – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The ICC Manager and Deputy Manager had led some of the early work in the community and built on their good relationships with the community leaders. The community is now exploring within its members what other SRAs might be possible.

The government commitment was to:

- provide funding
- coordinate their involvement and funding
- work together to make the SRA happen
- work with the community on the SRA
- work on supporting NGOs to work together.

The community was to deliver on:

- providing labour and resources through CDEP
- support for the involvement of young people in a number of ways
- mentoring young people
- develop a number of support strategies for young people
- encouraging NGOs in working together.

Some of the issues raised by non-Indigenous staff with the review team were that:

- the community had originally wanted a much more simple outcome in the form of attracting a particular form of activity into the area and did not want the wider focus or wider recreational activities proposed
- the community did not understand SRAs and had no idea of the concept of shared responsibility
- the funding should have gone to their own agency to do whatever paid staff thought were the issues (several thought this)
- the ICC should not have been talking to young people as that was not part of the culture
- the women were not the leaders and spokespeople and that therefore the ICC should not be talking with them
- there was a very low level of cooperation between the local NGOs and the SRA would not change that.

What the review team heard from around 12 community leaders were that:

- they strongly supported both SRAs and wanted the facilities and the agreed focus for all young people
- they fully understood shared responsibility and had found the SRA process a very good change in being listened to and heard by governments
- the NGOs needed to work better together and the SRA might help that
- the ICC had been very good at listening to young people and to women (from three male Elders) and they wanted their young people in particular to 'step up' to being leaders
- it was time for change in the community and they wanted more government agencies to come out and listen to them like the ICC staff had done.

The young people interviewed had strong views about how well or otherwise NGO entities had listened to them in the past. Several older people interviewed echoed these views.

In this case study the review team was struck by the lack of respect for the views of the community within some of the NGOs; the very poor relationships between NGOs; the lack of

awareness of gender issues and of the role of women in the community by some NGO staff; the high level of respect the community had for the work of the ICC staff over the past two years; and the level of optimism this community felt about the future which was significantly attributed to the SRA process. The other issue noted was the frustration, expressed by several male Elders, about the unwillingness of some non-Indigenous staff to respect what the community wanted. One of the Elders in this site visit gave one of the most sophisticated descriptions of shared responsibility agreements the review team heard across every interview, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This same Elder described how the work of the ICC was giving them hope and optimism including how important it was to talk with young people and with the women in the community.

The review team explored the issues raised by the non-Indigenous staff with the ICC and sought some clarification of how they perceived the issues and process, what had been done to build links and ownership, and how they thought these issues might impact on the SRAs into the future. The ICC staff reported spending considerable time with these staff making consistent overtures to them to engage with the process, and having a high level of respect for those staff who did try and engage with the concept and the process irrespective of their personal views. They saw significant challenges ahead for this community and SRAs.

Asked what they would do differently in hindsight in this community, ICC staff said they would probably try and do several SRAs instead of one comprehensive SRA. However the review team is not convinced that this would have worked as well for the community as the current process. The community members see the interconnectedness of the issues for young people between strong families, access to education, recreational opportunities for girls and boys, rehabilitation, health advice and services, and employment. The Elders and other members also see a need for supporting strong Indigenous leadership for the next couple of years to help the community to deal with what they see as tensions between family groups which are not helped by some of the NGO staff involved. Elders in this community (male and female) see SRAs as a chance to build understandings across family and language groups and to making a big difference for young people.

This SRA might benefit from some formal mediation to engage the non-Indigenous NGO staff in getting behind the community and to implementing the SRA in accordance with what the community wants. This mediation could ensure that the NGO staff are fully aware of the community's views. Most of the NGOs involved attract significant sums of government funding for programs and services. Ironically it is a financially independent NGO which is currently offering the most in-principle support to this SRA process.