

**POTENTIAL BARRIERS to POLICY IMPLEMENTATION in
REMOTE COMMUNITIES**

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Foreword

The decision to undertake an investigatory research project into the 'barriers' to, or the 'inhibitors' of successful national policy implementation in Remote communities was made by the North Australia Development Unit (NADU), to complement their on-going research projects about the implementation of Department of Social Security (DSS) policy initiatives in remote Australian communities.

It has been observed that policy initiatives often fail to achieve their stated outcomes in remote areas. In the process of implementation, a great amount of resources have been expended. Mostly, this expenditure has been for disappointing outcomes! Why might this be so?

In the recent past, attention has focussed on the nature and development of policy, in the belief that perhaps the policy initiative was wrongly, incorrectly, unrealistically formulated. Lawrence & Williams echo the views of others, when they "recognise that the wholesale transplanting of urban models and policies [into remote communities] is inappropriate." (1990: 47.) More recently, as part of the social justice strategy, greater effort by Government has been directed towards the process of policy formation. In an attempt to ensure that policies are well formulated and relevant to the needs of people living in remote areas, more policy formulators are establishing consultative processes.

In an absolute sense, sound consultation is critical phase of effective policy development; however, it can become an onerous burden on community members. It is possible for a small community's energies to be sapped by the ongoing consultative process.

It is not uncommon for representatives of up to 60 government departments or other agencies to want to 'consult' with members of small, remote, communities. There is a danger that residents can spend all their time in consultations, leaving little energy to apply for and/or implement the program outcomes of those consultations. Agencies, therefore, need to consider the impact of not only of their own consultations on the functioning of a small community but also that of all

the other agencies, departments, and organisations also servicing the small remote centre. There may be potential to combine with other agencies, contract out the consultation to other agencies, rely of the information of their officers or perhaps even use some of the information already available.

Despite the more recent commitment and increased attention to the policy formulation processes, limited improvements in policy implementation via outcomes, have been observed.

This paper will attempt to identify and describe some of the potential barriers or inhibitors to policy implementation and the context in which they operate. It attempts to answer the question, "What prevents policy from achieving the desired or intended outcomes for beneficiaries?"

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the whole ambit of barriers, however the exploration of the more significant barriers will provide the reader with a basis from which to extend their own understanding of the nature of the inhibitors to policy implementation. This approach has been chosen in the belief that there is generally "no serious difficulty with the current statement of federal policy towards Aborigines, [and other remote area residents] but rather with its implementation" (Coombes, Brandl, Snowden, 1983: 15.)

The research methodology is 'participant- observation'. This method involves the critical analysis of the experiences of the participant- observer in the situation under examination. An integral part of the process is the reflection upon those experiences. In this way the research is grounded in the reality of the remote situation and the experiences of remote community members.

The researcher has implemented policy initiatives and delivered services to residents of remote communities for some ten years in the human services field in both central and northern Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The effective translation of National social policy into practice; or the implementation of those policies in the communities of the remote areas of Australia involves a process. In its simplest academic form, effective policy implementation involves formulating the right policies; choosing the right service delivery mechanism; selecting and resourcing the right providers; directing the service to the right clients; and providing the service program at the right time.

However the successful implementation of policy in remote areas is, in reality a complex process. It is in fact a dynamic inter- and intra- action of the above factors and sub-processes. All of these interactions occur within the context or environment in which the intended policy is to operate.

Some people have regarded the process of policy implementation as a linear process- that is the chain: from needs identification and policy formulation, through to program development and service delivery, having a discrete beginning and an clear end point. However attractive this paradigm is from a theoretical point of view, the reality is much more complex. In fact it is probably more accurate to regard the process as a cyclic or a tight spiral, involving feedback and self - regulating mechanisms.

When we attempt to tease out a particular part of the process for closer examination we discover, as Muir, writing in 1967, frustratingly remarked, that it is "hitched to everything else in the universe" (Muir, 1967) We therefore need to be aware of the danger of treating the connected parts as though they are discrete, stand alone entities.

As well as being aware of the interlinked factors and processes, we need to recognise that underlying the implementation of all social policy are a number of on-going, yet to be satisfactorily resolved, dilemmas and conflicts in the field of service delivery and policy implementation.

Major debates rage around several of these dilemmas. These have included :-

- Whether policies should be formulated specifically for people of the remote area versus universally applicable or national mainstream policies.
- The use of locally recruited staff versus imported staff in direct service delivery.
- The relative benefits of professional staff versus non- professional staff.
- Whether policy initiatives should be provided through generalist services versus the use of specialist services ?
- The need for and appropriateness of regulation versus the de-regulation of service provision.
- The meaning of Equality (sameness) versus the concept of Equity (fairness) in the provision of services to remote areas.
- The pragmatics of service provision versus the ideal.

In addition to the compounding confusion caused by these dilemmas, there are certain assumptions which arise in their resolution. These assumptions have consequences in policy delivery. For example, it may well be worth questioning rather than assuming whether in fact people want the service being offered. It is not uncommon for people to say they want something even though they may not. It is also possible for outsiders to misinterpret what is that people want. It can happen that the community wants a particular service but not the consequences of that service. Let me explain. In remote Aboriginal communities there is often the desire to have European services based in the community so it is readily accessible. What is not wanted is the changes that providing that service brings; i.e. the need for expensive housing and other infrastructure and maintenance demands and costs. One service provider, in his/herself, may not impact on the community culture; but several, undoubtedly will. In some places, up to half the 'community's population may be non- indigenous.

SECTION ONE

THE REMOTE AREA CONTEXT of POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The policy implementation context of the remote area community can be very different from its urban or metropolitan counterpart.

It can differ according to:-

- The conflict or competition in policy implementation goals.
- The diversity of community management structures.
- The sparsity of population.
- The nature of interpersonal relationships.
- The sense of remoteness
- The geographic factors.
- The nature of Time.
- The nature of confidentiality.

Conflict or competition in policy goals

In remote areas government policy objectives can appear to be competing, conflicting, and contradictory. In an urban or metropolitan areas such conflict and competition happens as well, but because the population is larger and more diverse the negative impact is often absorbed by the large mass and therefore less apparent. In a small remote community the difficulties resulting from delivery conflict and/or competition can become disabling. For example, there are agencies committed to the provision of mainstream human services, whilst at the same time trying to support and maintain traditional Aboriginal culture. The goals of the agencies may be mutually exclusive. The policies may contribute to frustration and social problems of small communities because young people do not have the opportunity to use the skills they have learned.

Diversity of Management Structures

Remote communities may be managed by a range of different authorities including the following:-

- Aboriginal Community Council;
- Local Government authority;
- Military Command;
- Government Departments/ Statutory Authorities;
- Mining Company;

- Incorporated organisation;
- or Local Progress Association, (with limited powers).

The implications of the different management authorities and legislative arrangements can be profound and far reaching. An important Family Planning Service for young people was scuttled by a Community Council dominated by Roman Catholic interests. Mining companies have been known to prefer to sack staff experiencing personal or family problems, rather than to permit the establishment of support services for those families in the camp. They believed that to provide a service would imply that they had lost control over the camp.

Population Characteristics

Remote areas are characterised by small population centres which are spread over large geographic areas.

However they can exhibit extremes and diversity in population characteristics. A remote area township may have a very high proportion of elderly people as a result of the change in the economic base of the area, resulting in the younger people leaving to find work in another centre. Similarly, mining towns often have a very high proportion of young mothers whose natural helping networks are located elsewhere. Conversely, many mining camps are exclusively staffed by males, often young and may or may not be 'dry'. Each demographic situation presents its own particular service delivery difficulties.

Interpersonal Relationships

In remote areas it is reported that, people tend to relate to each other on the basis of their personality or identity rather than the position or job they hold. The relationship which exists between client and worker, or worker and fellow worker is often as or more important than their competence or the way they perform in their jobs. People can be employed in positions beyond their level of objective competence but they are liked, and respected for who and what they attempt to do. This means that service providers, whether from within the community or outside the community cannot rely solely on having a significant position and for being competent in that role. Conversely a service implementer cannot rely exclusively on a position holder to provide a service their role implies.

Nor does it necessarily guarantee competence. In remote areas service providers must be credible and have strong links with the client group.

Sense of Remoteness

Most fundamental to 'the delivery context' is the notion of "remoteness". The perspective one takes, depends on where you're looking from. To urban based policy formulators, who regard themselves as being at the centre of activity, people living in what are geographically defined remote areas, are remote. They (the geographically remote) are the ones who are faraway from where the action is, they live on the periphery. From the point of view of the people living in geographically remote area, urban policy makers are remote. For these geographically remote people their community in reality "is the centre of the Universe" and everyone else is remote.

Urban based policy makers can often be remote in a way that is not just geographically or physically distant. They can be remote from the concerns, experiences, values, attitudes of remote area people. They are often the "mainstreamers" who have little knowledge of the 2-3% of the population in the remote north Australia. Their priorities and concerns are not those of the remote area people they are supposedly assisting. Although the centres of power and decision-making in the areas of Law, Policy, and Finance are located in the large metropolitan centres; their influence spreads to the periphery. However, their remote area programmes can never be successfully implemented in remote areas without the support of those people living at the periphery, unless the policy implementers wish to expend large resources to impose their will.

Geography

Remote area geographic factors in service delivery must also be considered. They must be considered for their direct implications in service delivery and therefore their role in the success of any policy initiative. The most important of these are:-

- vast distance,
- climate and conditions,
- difficulty of the terrain.

It is not uncommon for service recipients to live some 500 kms from a regional centre; and upwards of 1-1500 kms from a capital city. Some geographic communities or centres are situated closer to significant centres outside of Australian sovereignty than to their own national centres.

Distance affects the choice of mode of service delivery in important ways. It may in fact suggest, amongst other things, that a local service provider is preferable to a visiting provider. It may influence the decision to fly a worker rather than make them drive. Transport in remote areas warrants separate consideration. The vast distances involved means that the question of time takes on a different and more significant dimension. This will be discussed in detail under a separate heading.

The climatic conditions of extreme heat, humidity, dust and 'flies' make working uncomfortable. This impacts on staff and recruitment practices. Should staff be selected on the basis of their capacity to cope with the climatic conditions or their technical competence? This is not to suggest that work in the remote areas is only for the 'macho', but it does mean that consideration to these factors must be given. It may mean that extra equipment, such as air-conditioning should be provided, stress reduction strategies must be put in to place. Weather affects the choice of equipment, equipment may need to be resistant to mould, and/or dust-proofed. Regardless of the nature of the factor, it will mean extra cost in the purchase of climatically suitable equipment, or else an acceptance of a shorter life expectancy, with its consequent replacement cost, higher and more frequent maintenance and repair costs.

The difficulty of the terrain places stress on both the vehicle and the driver. Vehicles need to be sturdy, and often four wheel drive vehicles are the only suitable vehicles. Equipment not normally associated with or used by a particular service will be required. Urban based purchasing and requisitioning officers are often surprised when, for example, social workers make requests for:- quality driving light, winches, tow-ropes, shovels, swags and tuckerboxes, rather than their usual orders of writing pads, envelopes, biros and manilla folders!

The effect of terrain on staff and vehicles means the costs will be increased through the need for extra repairs, maintenance and replacement. Hopefully, workers will not need replacing in the same sense as vehicles and equipment. However, staff do wear out, get fed up, leave prematurely and/or incur heavy workers compensation payments, should adequate support, training and occupational health practices not be in place.

The terrain requires different skills and attitudes in a worker. Training for the skills to cope with the demands will need to be provided prior to the worker's entry into the field. Developing the right survival attitudes is a little more difficult, but equally necessary.

Time

Time is understood differently in the remote areas. It is not just that people talk and walk more slowly than the urban counterparts. Things just take longer. They take longer because of:-

- remote area people's expectations
- delays with freight
- communications difficulties
- other demands on and commitments of people
- priority given to the program
- level of local decision-making
- level of experience held by service delivery staff
- lack of, or reduced access to program support.

Confidentiality

One of the important ethics and values of human services providers is that of client confidentiality. Most educational training institutions describe this concept as being one where the client is almost guaranteed the 'sanctity of the confessional'. Whilst there will always be some caveats to absolute confidentiality, even in the anonymous context of the populous urban centre, in small remote areas, the notion of client confidentiality takes on a very different meaning. People are less anonymous, and their private lives often overlap with their public lives. Often the service providers may have their employed or service delivery

role, complicated by their personal relationships with their clients. It is possible to have a situation develop where every service provision agency, separately, knows the circumstances of their clients, but will feel constrained to discuss the case with other agencies for fear of breaching confidentiality.

SECTION TWO

SPECIFIC POTENTIAL BARRIERS to POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to the potential barriers arising from "the context" in which the policy is to be implemented, there are specific possible inhibitors to be considered. It has already been stated, that these possible inhibitors are dynamically inter- and intra- acting; it must be restated repeatedly that whilst, for the sake of clarity, these factors have been isolated for closer examination; they are in fact interlinked and interacting.

1. STAFF

Background/ General

At some stage, policy implementers must consider the issue of staff, either as direct service deliverers or as service delivery intermediaries, who undertake service delivery on behalf of the service program provider. Sometimes the intermediaries are formally contracted to deliver the service, or part of the service on behalf of the providers, other times intermediaries will act as 'voluntary' or 'de facto' agents by default. These 'de facto' agents can be other professional human service providers, or members of the 'natural helping' network, who have recognised a gap in service provision and have responded out of sheer necessity.

Some debate has centred around the issue of locally recruited staff versus imported staff. Sometimes a decision is made to recruit locally because of labour market deficits in the remote area and the programme is used as a job creation initiative, on other occasions the difficulties in attracting outside workers has meant that by comparison the local worker becomes a more attractive alternative. Sometimes the decision is influenced by local rivalries and political considerations. There must be sound reasons for choosing a particular option. Should the recruitment issue be decided upon criteria not related to the programme goals, and their achievement in the local context, it will inevitably result in the implementation being compromised.

In addition to the 'normal' considerations regarding staff and staffing, remote area program implementation staff issues warrant extra consideration, because of the special and different demands on and of staff.

Recruitment

Many program implementers believe that recruiting staff is a simple matter. Just run an advertisement and make a choice from amongst the applicants. This may (or may not) be so for the recruitment of staff for urban programs, it is definitely not so in remote areas. Just getting people to apply can be a major and expensive undertaking in itself.

The first consideration is whether to recruit locally or outside of the area. There are advantages and disadvantages to either approach. Ideally the issue should be settled on the basis of the skills required for the position. Unfortunately this is not always the case. There may be very good reasons for opting for one or the other, in any event, as stated earlier, the decision should be made consciously and taking into account the issues.

In addition to the perceived disadvantage of working in remote areas, whilst a significant disincentive, in itself, there are other factors. Even in a major regional centre, potential applicants will need to consider their need for,

- Housing, its availability, suitability and cost.
- Schooling, in particular the availability and standard of secondary education.
- Child Care facilities.
- Employment opportunities for spouse.
- Recreational and cultural activities, its range and availability, for the worker, spouse and family.
- Medical services.
- Significantly higher cost of living.

Recruiting staff can be made easier if sufficient consideration is paid to the geographic service location of staff. If there is a choice of several potential locations, it is well-advised to choose the most attractive place from an urban perspective. An example, 'of how not to do it', underscores the point. A government department, wanting to provide a visiting

service to a number of small remote communities spread throughout a large geographic area; chose to build a house and office to locate the worker as close as possible to the service area. They chose a 'township' which consisted of a roadhouse and the 'base' for three other service providers. Subsequently they experienced major recruitment and retention problems and the intended service was rarely provided. Within two hours drive, was a regional centre, where the worker could have been located and accessed many urban services and facilities, thereby making recruitment a much more attractive proposition. The facility cost a great amount to build and maintain - for what appears little gain in terms of outcomes and service effectiveness.

Gender

Attitudes of people living in remote areas are often different and more conservative than those of their urban counterparts, particularly in the area of gender-determined role expectations. A policy implementer needs to consider the importance of gender issues to their proposed program. It is not only a question of which gender of staff to employ, it is also one of the balance between the number of each gender. The usually touted equal balance of staff gender may not always be appropriate.

Number

Program implementers will need to ensure that staff establishments are set at realistic levels, taking the particular difficulties of the area into account. Usually staff numbers will need to be higher than urban levels, even though the numbers of clients serviced will be less. The numbers need to allow for added travel in servicing; staff turn over; difficulty in recruiting; leave for training etc.

Experience & Renumeration

Because remote areas work makes high demands of staff, it is vital to consider the level of experience required by the staff for the successful implementation of the program. Remote area staff are required to deal with a range of complex and difficult situations, often in isolation and without extensive, or readily available support. They do not have the benefit of drawing own their peers for advice and guidance. To implement the program properly, they will need to draw on a wide experience base, in order to provide not only a high level of service to

clients, but also to ensure their own emotional well-being. They will often need both a broad range of professional experience and the life's experience to deal with living in some communities.

Because there is a need for people with experience, it will often mean people will need to be employed and paid at a higher level than their urban counterparts to compensate for their professional isolation and their added work-related responsibilities.

Attitude

The attitude of workers towards their professional work and the community in which they work, will play a critical role in their personal happiness and the effectiveness of the program.

Staff must be positive, innovative and creative. It is difficult enough working in remote areas without having the burden of a negative attitude. It is impossible to hide negativity in a small community. There is really no room for those who come simply to "do time" to get up the ladder.

A staff attitude of bureaucratic compliance rather than one of practical pragmatic expediency, will serve to alienate the worker from the community but also prevent the client from receiving timely service. This is not to suggest that the legitimate administrative requirements of the agency should be ignored, but rather to encourage the worker to act in the spirit and intention of the requirements and to apply them in a way which enhances the goals of the program rather than to use the administrative demands to thwart the client from accessing the service.

Flexibility and adaptability are prime attitudes required for remote area workers.

Motivation

Remote area workers will need to be highly and independently motivated. The nature of the work necessitates it. It is just not possible to compensate for lack of motivation. As a rule of thumb, it is easier for a supervisor to redirect enthusiasm into program appropriate directions than to 'stir' an un-motivated worker into action.

Commitment

People living in remote areas for any length of time, will observe the never-ending passing parade of government workers through their community. A new worker may experience being treated as a 'blow-in' or a 'johnny come lately' - a person without a history, without a place in the community network, or a person without credibility, - a person seen to be 'here today, gone tomorrow'. Often this view of workers is based in the reality of community people's experience. There will be some emotional distance between new workers and townsfolk. A new worker is well advised to be honest and realistic in their promises to clients and others in the remote community.

Commitment to the program and clients must be demonstrated, but commitment does not mean forever. It means being serious about doing a good job, being fair, reliable and honest, not making unrealistic promises or commitments which are not able to be maintained.

Skills

Rural and remote area policy implementation has been variously described as requiring generic skills, that is skills which are 'generalist' rather than 'specialist'. Whilst this may be generally so, it is not to deny the importance of and need for 'specialist' skills in some programs. It is more the case of identifying the program skill needs, rather than blindly adhering to a set of prescriptive competencies. Some programs will require a 'specialist' application of 'generic' skills, and others the 'generic' application of 'specialist' skills. In every event, as indicated earlier the workers' skills will need to be of a high order because the worker often works alone, in isolation, rarely having the benefit of drawing on the experience and expertise of others. They will need to be people who read and take responsibility for their on-going training and competency development.

Retention

It is easy to think that once staff have been recruited the troubles are over! This is not so. Having recruited staff it is then necessary to retain them long enough for them to develop local knowledge, rapport and achieve practical outcomes. This will often mean a period of a couple of years. It is necessary to give specific consideration to this for two major reasons. Firstly, it has been difficult and expensive to obtain the staff, and it will be

difficult and expensive to replace them. Secondly, high staff turnover reduces the effectiveness of the service. Staff turnover is particularly damaging to services requiring high levels of interpersonal relationships and credibility. Rapport and relationships develop slowly in remote areas. The credibility of the service will plummet with high levels of staff turnover. This will make it even more difficult for the worker who follows to establish themselves.

Staff can more successfully be retained by a range of means. Firstly the worker needs to feel that the job is worth doing and valued by the organisation and/or the community. No-one likes to do a job which isn't valued. In a remote area, where the personal demands are great, it is even more important. The position should be adequately recompensed for its special difficulties, demands and responsibilities, which are over and above those normally involved in the position in an urban situation. A reasonable guide would be to consider a payment for the same job at a grade higher than the urban based grade.

High level supervision and support must be provided. The opportunity to discuss the work and any problems arising is a critical means in defusing any potential stress. We must remember that the diverse and informal support networks available to urban based workers, often do not exist in the bush.

Many workers feel that their skills atrophy whilst working in remote areas. This is an unfortunate staff attitude and managers of remote areas program must consciously work to overcome this situation. It is true that the remote areas worker often draws on different skills, in different ways from urban workers.

Making unrealistic demands of the worker will hasten their departure from remote areas. Unwittingly, urban-based managers will expect similar performance outcomes from their remote area staff as they do from their urban staff. By not taking the special demands and difficulties inherent in remote area service delivery into account when setting program goals, it is easy to make unrealistic demands of staff. Workloads and program performance targets must be established at achievable levels

and must accommodate time for travel, network building, orientation, infrastructure deficits, etc.

Allocation

It is not sufficient to just recruit the necessary number and gender of experienced, motivated and committed with the appropriate attitude. The staff need to be allocated in a manner which is appropriate to the demands of the program. Allocation of staff to their duties needs to consider, both the needs of the program, and also the needs of the individual worker. It must be remembered that workers are not interchangeable units in a mechanistic sense, they are individuals with unique skills, qualities and characteristics; they have their own strengths and weaknesses, their own preferences and aspirations. A wise manager will take these factors into account when allocating duties. It can be dangerous to over emphasise the positive aspects of multi-skilling.

A program implementor will need to decide on what basis to allocate staff. All will have their particular disadvantages and advantages. Several possibilities exist, not only singularly, but also in combination. Staff may be allocated according to various criteria. These possibilities include: -

- the nature or type of client group.
- the preference of the client.
- the geographic location and distribution of clients.
- the service function to be performed.
- the personal or professional preference of staff.
- the level and range of skills possessed by staff.

Other allocation considerations include: -

- the program staffing requirements.
- the gender issues.
- the need to pair less experienced staff with more experienced staff.
- if paired staff or teams, the compatibility of the team members to each other.
- the need for program continuity.
- worker safety issues (physical, emotional and professional).

Because many people living in remote areas, feel frustrated with the 'passing parade' of service providers, and prefer to develop meaningful relationships with service providers over an extended period of time, it is advantageous to limit changes in staff's allocated duties. It is also helpful, where possible to use a 'buddy' or team system in order to maintain at least a measure of continuity in service delivery and local knowledge.

Training

Training of staff must be an on-going concern for program implementors. It impacts significantly on the quality of the service provided, on the ability of the implementors to recruit and retain staff, on their morale and level of job satisfaction, and the credibility of the service. Program implementors will find that training for remote area staff is expensive and difficult to provide; and problematic for the continuity of service delivery.

High levels of staff turnover and attrition will necessitate program implementors giving a high priority, not only to orientation of staff but also their on-going professional development.

Training will have three primary foci: -

- orientation,
- specific skills formation, and,
- on-going professional development.

Orientation will need to address the service provision context, the program, and personal introduction to the community in which the worker will live. Effective orientation will assist the new worker to become productive sooner, and will reduce the likelihood of job dissatisfaction and early attrition. To achieve a sound orientation the worker will require a program which includes: -

- familiarisation to the agency, its role, function and purpose.
- introduction to staff, both administrative and professional.
- knowledge of its administrative and bureaucratic requirements.
- the requirements of the program.
- familiarisation to the local service area, its history, politics, relationships, hazards, supports etc.
- any particular worker safety issues.
- introduction to key community members.

Specific skill formation

The particular demands of the remote area will necessitate the worker having skills which are rarely part of formal professional training and often not those acquired through the 'normal' course of life. Depending on the nature of the service and the environment in which it is to be provided, specific skills will be required.

These skills may include: -

- four-wheel driving.
- dirt road driving.
- vehicle maintenance and emergency repairs.
- emergency first aid.
- HF and two-way radio operation.
- bush survival skills.
- computing skills.
- personal & professional networking skills.
- personal survival skills.
- stress management.
- cross & intercultural knowledge and skills.
- use of interpreters.
- service and program specific skills.

Professional development must include, both program specific and be situationally appropriate, and also address the broader professional development needs. It must also be an on-going process to enable workers to remain abreast of developments within the profession and also to take account of changing circumstances and personal needs. Many urban based training programs, assume the worker is operating in an urban situation with a high level of human service infrastructure, referring to the use of multidisciplinary or specialist approaches, or the appropriateness of referral to other service providers, will are clearly not relevant to the lone, isolated worker.

2. TRANSPORT

By the very nature of the remote areas, all program implementors must consider the impact of distance and therefore transport on their delivery systems. For programs relying on face-to-face contact or direct service this will be even more critical .

Transport and Client Issues

Clients will be affected by privacy, cost and availability concerns. These will be further influenced by whether transport is public or private.

If the mode of service delivery be direct visits to the client, the major cost will be borne on the service deliverer, but the client will still be affected. The client may suffer a lack of privacy and confidentiality. Anyone seeing the service provider's vehicle heading out to an isolated property, or parked outside a house will jump to the conclusion that the householder is experiencing difficulties.

Conversely, a client needing to travel to a regional centre to access a service, will need to make judgements about the value of the anticipated benefit. For most remote area clients, they will need to make a substantial investment to access a service. This will vary from perhaps as low as twenty dollars to as high as several hundred dollars. Many potential clients may not have that amount of money to invest on the off-chance that the service will be of benefit to them. Sometimes, for unforeseen, or emergency problems the client may have made the investment, but the service deliverer is unavailable. The consequences are obvious, the client

has not received the benefit, is less likely to attempt to access the service in the future, they have experienced a significant loss of both income, through loss of wages, but also their investment. The service agency will experience a loss in reputation, and its staff will be less valued by the community. Staff who feel under-valued by the community are more likely to leave prematurely, thus contributing to staff turnover, thereby reducing the service's effectiveness.

Rarely is there efficient, adequate, inexpensive public transport available to people of remote areas. Often clients will have to travel to a distant town to catch buses or planes. Some places are only serviced once or twice a week. Even though some families have private transport, this does not mean that the potential client has access to it. It has been well documented (Coorey, 1989: 128.) that women who are victims of domestic violence are denied use of the family car, to keep them virtual prisoners in their own homes. Even for less sinister reasons, the only vehicle available to families may be the one used by the husband to go to work.

Choice of Mode of Transport

The choice of transport mode for service providers will in part have been determined by choice of the mode of service delivery, and in part by the nature of the geography and climate. For example, many communities in the North are only accessible by air or sea, particularly during the "Wet" season. When using either air or sea transport the service deliverer will need to consider the consequences of their choice. The most significant of these are lack of mobility upon arrival and lack of flexibility in time spent in the community. The worker will either need to have a vehicle stationed in the community for their use during the visit, or need to hire or borrow one or walk. Workers who are unpopular or from services not wanted or unpopular may find it difficult to borrow vehicles when needed. Flexibility in service provision is reduced by the need to complete the work on the ground before the plane or boat is scheduled to leave. This results in either the work being rushed through to a resolution or else the worker planning to see less clients.

In addition to the idiosyncrasies of the staff, some of whom will refuse to fly in light aircraft, or are temporarily or permanently without a drivers licence, the choice of mode of transport will be influenced by-

- the availability of mode of transport.
- the suitability of the mode of transport to the program.
- the need for flexibility in transport.
- the cost of the transport.

Air

Air travel is very expensive, around \$250 an hour for a charter aircraft; and inflexible. It is possible to reduce the cost of charters by sharing with other service providers. Whilst superficially this appears an attractive option, it needs to be considered whether the sharing is appropriate. It can work if both agencies need to deal with the same group and have sufficient time to address both issues. It can also work if service providers need to see different clients. It cannot work if the service providers wish to see the same people, at the same time, for different reasons!

Road

Road transport in remote areas is characterised by difficult terrain and reliability is subject to weather. A heavy rain may close a road for periods from a few days to several months. Extremes of weather are uncomfortable on staff and place extra demands on their personal coping capacity. The difficult terrain also place and make extra demands on staff. They require skills often not brought with them, when recruited, necessitating additional training. The terrain requires suitable, properly equipped vehicles which are expensive. The extra expense, is not only in the initial capital cost, but also in increased running, maintenance and repairs. The choice of vehicle must be suitable for its intended use. The choice must also be influenced by the ability of local mechanics to repair and service particular models of vehicles, and the ready availability of spare parts. A locally unavailable spare part may take several weeks to arrive from the capital city dealer.

Sea

Sea transport suffers from many of the same difficulties as air transport. It is inflexible, expensive, and often schedules are inconvenient.

3. COMMUNICATIONS

All policy implementation necessitates communication. Communicating the availability of the service to potential clients, implementation intermediaries or agents, or other agencies working in the area, and communicating with the urban-based policy formulators.

In remote areas, as already mentioned the relationship between service provider and recipient is paramount. The use of a commonly understood language is also paramount. Even using English as a means of communication there may be difficulties. For many Aboriginal people living in remote areas, English is a second language. Service providers will need cross-cultural skills and ability and available, sensitive use of interpreters.

Policy implementors also need to consider: -,

- which communications modes (phone, fax, computer link, H.F. radio) available.
- the accessibility of the mode, by whom, and when.
- the cost.
- the appropriateness of the mode to the target audience.
- the appropriateness of the mode to the service provision.

Methods of Communication

The main methods of communication available are: -

Direct face to face communication

- effective & usually the most popular with clients.
- expensive.
- time consuming.

Mail

- suitable for literate clients.
- infrequent mail services (sometimes only one mail service a week).
- slow response, resulting in delayed client receipt of service.
- need to give and receive appropriate information first time.

Fax

- suitable for literate clients.
- increasingly popular in remote areas as the Telecom network extends.
- fast & reliable.
- not confidential or permanent.
- very useful for quick response and confirmation of receipt (only to destination- not individual receipt).
- relatively cheap- although still beyond the resources of many potential individual clients. (Most transmissions are charged at STD rates)

Mass media

Is only one way communication, with delayed feedback being possible only. It is a depersonalised form of communication, best used for the transmission of general information only.

Television (commercial and BRACS)

- popular.
- wide audience reach.
- difficult and/or costly to use for detailed information.
- very suitable for raising levels of community awareness of issues.
- commercial accessibility dependant on finances.
- BRACS accessibility dependant on palitability of material and perceived audience interest.
- Service providers can not insist that their material is transmitted.

Radio (commercial, ABC, community)

- popular
- cheaper than T.V.
- more accessible than T.V.

Newspapers (local, state, national)

- only suitable for literate clients.
- national papers only read by select target groups.
- local and State papers more widely read.

Telephone

requires skill and confidence in its use for both the client and service provider.

Private

- availability determined by cost and extent of Telecom network.
- expensive (\$1.80 / min (av) & rental charges).
- secure.

Public

- limited in number, often in high demand and often unservicable due to vandalism, lack of maintenance and repair.
- subject to damage.
- not private.
- not secure.
- expensive (\$1.80/min approx.).
- location, maybe distant and inconvenient.

Radio- telephone

- often unreliable- subject to atmospheric & other electrical interference.
- expensive to install & maintain.
- not private or confidential.
- calls must be booked in advance.
- time limited calls (usually 3mins + one extension)

Two-way radio: H.F., C.B. (u.h.f., v.h.f.)

- capital outlay- C.B. cheap, (\$200) H.F. expensive (\$3000)
- low maintenance & operational costs.
- immediate verbal feedback.
- not private or confidential.
- potential large audience reach.
- proven effectiveness (e.g. School of the Air, RFDS. medical scheds).
- subject to atmospheric and electrical interference.
- very suitable for emergency use.

Use of Interpreters

Because many Aboriginal people living in remote areas use English as a second or third language, it may be necessary, or often is useful to use interpreters.

Using interpreters will require specific skills from the worker. It will also require an understanding of the dynamics involved with their use.

There may be difficulties experienced in using interpreters: -

- their lack of availability.
- their possible lack of training and experience, both in interpreting and the needs of the program.
- the impact of their relationship to and with the client.
- their acceptability to the client.
- the cost.

4. MODE OF SERVICE DELIVERY

The choice of service delivery mode is fundamental. The most basic choice to be made is whether to provide a direct service to clients or an indirect service through the use of intermediaries or agents. Ideally, the choice should be made on the basis of providing the best possible service to clients. The choice will be influenced by the size of the town (or potential or actual client group), the nature of the client group, and the type of service/program to be provided.

Direct Service Provision

Direct service provision is the mode of service provision where the agency implements and manages its own program from within its own resources, by its own staff and retains direct control, responsibility over the program and relates directly to the client group.

Service implementors considering the merits and appropriateness of direct service provision models are referred to the comprehensive NADU publication; "Service Delivery: Options for Remote Communities" (Smith: 1989). Smith outlines in this paper (1989: 2.), the ten major models of

service delivery for the provision of welfare services to people living in remote areas. These are: -

- (Range of) Specialist Services.
- Multifunctional Service / Centre.
- Satellite Centres
- Mobile Services
- Itinerent Specialists
- Multiskilled Community (Welfare) Worker.
- Community (regional / local) Development Officer.
- On Call Service / Centre.
- Local Volunteer Community Service.
- The Enhancement of Natural Network and Self Help Groups.

In his discussion of their suitability, he makes the point that whilst he describes these models as if they were discrete, they are in fact, not mutually exclusive and may in some situations be used in a complementary manner.

Indirect Service Provision

Some services are provided to clients by agencies other than those responsible for the program. This has been described as indirect service provision or the use of intermediaries. For example, a statutory welfare authority may provide services to children by using the services of a visiting health worker. Police officers may provide emergency financial assistance to destitute or necessitous people on behalf of a government department.

Use of intermediaries

There are difficulties arising out of the use of intermediaries. Amongst those are that the service provided: -

- may not be of a standard, normally accepted or offered by the organisation,
- may not be available on a regular and reliable basis,
- may have reduced, minimal or nonexistent accountability,
- may be inequitably provided.

Despite its short-comings this system does meet some of the clients' needs. It is often better than nothing!

The advantages of the intermediary for the service provider is that this system is cheap and requires limited management or administrative input. However, the more time the actual service agency puts in with this contact, the better service the contact will offer. To be fair some services may not require any more than this level of service. In some situations it may well be of a sufficient standard to defuse pressure to provide a more comprehensive service. Herein lies the problem for those who have taken on this 'de facto' responsibility. The more and better they provide the service, the less incentive exists for the service provider to deal with their own service direct delivery issues.

Where a more formal and paid for contractual arrangement exist (as in the case of a paid community agent), the service provider *may* have greater input and influence over the delivery of the service. The emphasis is on the *may*. The service provider may have only an apparent influence, it can be a comfortable delusion. In remote areas the choice of agent is very limited. Political considerations, other policy imperatives, and agents' own agendas can, but need not prevent effective performance and achievement of policy objectives.

5. LEVEL OF DECISION MAKING

The level within the service delivery system of decision-making has profound consequences on the quality of service provision in the the remote areas. It is not uncommon for the decision making processes to be removed from the direct service providers necessitating the referral of matters to a central or removed decision maker. For example, a Field worker may have the role of obtaining the information from a client necessary to determine the client's eligibility to an entitlement. Yet the decision to award the entitlement may be determined by an other officer, often in a central or regional office. In an urban situation, this may cause difficulties, but often the decision maker is familiar with the broad social context in which the decision must be made. However, when the decision involves situations beyond the experience and understanding of the decisionmaker difficulties occur. This is often the case for clients living in remote areas.

Fundamentally this is a question of balance between the need for efficiency and effectiveness in service provision; and, the need for program control and accountability.

In remote areas when the service provider is not the decisionmaker for that service major problems arise. These include: -

- Delays occur in the provision of service, arising from the need for more or supplementary information, resulting in increased stress and/or distress for the client.
- The loss of status for the service provider and subsequent loss of personal self esteem.
- The credibility of the service provider is reduced, often clients will be less enthusiastic in their use of the service.

In this situation it will take more time to achieve program goals leading to difficulties such as: -

- increased costs.
- reduced efficiency.
- increased client frustration and dissatisfaction.
- reduced worker job satisfaction.

However, this is not always the case as some workers may prefer limited job responsibility, and others may prefer to displace responsibilities for unpalatable decisions elsewhere in order to survive in a small closed community.

In policy implementation in remote communities, the decision where to place the decision-making powers warrants close consideration. There have been many examples where the power to make decisions has been both based locally and centrally and resulted in disaster. As a general principle, decision making powers should be located as close to the actual service provision as possible. In order to do this there must be trust and confidence by the centre in the workers at the periphery. The decision will be influenced by the quality of staff, training of staff, their experience, and the management structure and systems of accountability and support available.

6. RESOURCES

All program implementation will be influenced by the level of resources available to the program. These resources must either come from within the community or be provided from outside, or some combination of both.

Increasingly governments look towards local communities assisting with the implementation and the provision of services. This may be either in terms of material and/or non-material resources.

Material

The community material resources consist of infrastructure, such as halls, offices, sporting facilities, equipment, schools, etc; and funds.

Many programs require;-

- a matching of local contributions with government contributions (e.g. the \$ for \$, or the two for one, subsidy schemes).
- the ability to raise and service loan funds.
- capacity to sustain programs after their initial establishment.

Many small communities just donot have the capacity, because of their small or specialised nature of population to be able to meet these expectations.

Often, remote communities are characterised by limited and/or outdated, unsuitable infrastructures, and an inability or unwillingness to provide funds for certain programs. This may be in direct conflict with the needs of some community members.

Non-material

Humans form the basis of non-material resources available to a community. This may be not only the actual number of individuals available to assist, but also their characteristics. Characteristics which are important to service delivery include:-

- their creativity,
- their willingness to work together and level of co-operation,
- their management capacity and skills,
- their individual skills,

- the time available,
- the community's traditions of self-help, mutual aid and self reliance,
- the social institutions present in the community.

It is unwise to assume that a remote community will have the range of skills available in an urban community. Often remote communities will not have the range of professional skills available to it. In particular, skills in program management, administration, book-keeping and accounting, legal matters are often scarce or nonexistent.

The usual range of professional agencies, in particular, specialist services are not represented. Similarly the range of voluntary agencies expected in the urban community, such as St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Salvation Army, the Mission, are not available to remote communities.

Overwhelmingly, small remote communities, consist by their very nature of small populations, resulting in a small pool of people on which to draw. Any program relying on voluntary assistance, will need to compete with all the other demands made of volunteers. Individuals able and willing to volunteer are already very heavily committed to existing projects within the community. They are required to volunteer for services, not required of their urban counterparts. Many services in urban centred are staffed by paid employed staff. In remote areas, basic services, such as firefighting, rescue services, ambulance and first aid are activities undertaken by volunteers if they are to exist at all.

In addition to the already existing burden on communities, the changing role of women has reduced the availability of volunteers. This change in role has been prompted as much by the desire of women for different life ambitions, often out of sheer economic necessity. The rural crisis, with the falling of farm returns, and increased living costs has meant that many women must now seek paid employment to supplement the incomes of their spouse.

As stated earlier the delivery of services in remote areas requires additional resources which need also be supplied by the service

providers. This was discussed under the topics of staffing, transportation etc.

7. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

As discussed in the previous section about resources, many programs rely on a certain level of pre-existing community infrastructure for their successful implementation.

The level of material infrastructure in remote area communities is often low and poor. A notable exception to this generalisation, is the situation in some mining towns where the level and quality of the infrastructure is often high and well-developed. Policy implementors will need to consider their program's infrastructural requirements, and compare this with the infrastructure which is actually present in the remote community.

Infrastructural characteristics will determine the capacity and ability to establish, manage and maintain programs. Policy implementors will need to direct attention not only to the implementation of their particular program but also towards developing the overall infrastructure of the community. This may not only mean more expensive establishment costs, but also the need for increased cooperation and joint planning between government departments. In order to achieve both their individual and joint goals, the concurrent implementation of several government departments programs may be necessary.

8. TIME

Time has a different quality and significance once away from the busy urban centre. It is not that the length of minutes, hours and seconds change, but that they are valued differently. It is important to understand that the usual urban understanding and importance of time and timeframes cannot be applied in remote areas.

There are time considerations specific to service providers, and clients.

Service providers rarely have time to spare. The demands from managers and the need to be accountable place pressure on providers.

Use of time, often determined by urban standards, is regarded as one measure of worker performance. The effectiveness of a worker may be measured in terms of time bound goal attainment. The remote area worker may therefore be assessed according to unrealistic expectations.

Staff will need to spend extended time away from their base. This will have both professional and personal implications. Professionally it will mean that base- centred tasks will wait until the worker returns, to be attended to. Family and personal relationships may experience stress caused by these extended absences.

The appropriate use of time is often determined outside of the community according to criteria not equally valued by the community. A sense of frustration arises from this situation and is experienced by all parties, the clients, the centre based managers and the worker.

The amount of unproductive (non service provision) time compared with client service time can be very high.

Down time or unproductive service time can be caused by: -

- travel over long distances,
- breakdowns,
- difficult communication technology,
- other demands on people's time (including actual 333),
- delayed freight deliveries,
- adverse weather and climatic conditions,
- lack of support services,
- periodic visits of support or specialist services.

To provide a service to people in remote area is expensive. It will involve high levels of staff time (cost) to service few clients.

9. ASSUMPTIONS & EXPECTATIONS

Assumptions and expectations serve to confuse any issue, increase the likelihood of mis-communication, conflict, dis-satisfaction; and is generally unhelpful and counterproductive to the process of policy implementation.

Policy-makers assumptions

Urban-based policy-makers and implementers can make assumptions about people who live in remote communities. These assumptions may be about: -

- 'the rugged individualism' of people.
- their 'sense of community'.
- the meaning and significance of 'community'.
- the level of and capacity for self-help and mutual aid.
- their economic status.
- their financial capacity for 'user pay' services.
- their 'idyllic' lifestyle.
- the 'friendship' which exists between people.
- the homogeneity of populations.

What is problematic is that major and significant decisions about services and service provision can be made on the basis that there is truth and substance to these assumptions. Of course, many of these assumptions have a element of reality about them. What is true is that all communities are different and diverse and within communities, individuals may not fit 'the assumed picture'.

Remote area resident's assumptions

People living in remote areas also make assumptions about urban-based policy-makers and implementers. Their assumptions will be different, and are often centred around policy - makers lack of understanding of remote area concerns, the suspicion of central government and its bureaucrats, the capacity of policy to meet all community needs, the lack of policy - makers' concern for people. The point is that there is often a lack of mutual understanding between the residents and non - residents and centrally located policy - makers.

These assumptions and lack of understanding can often be based on poor communication between the two groups. It is therefore important for pre-delivery discussions to take place.

Expectations

The expectations of people living in remote areas is one of an improving quality of life with the equivalent level of services available to urban populations. A second expectation is that it is the role of 'government' to provide the services and facilities necessary for the improved quality of life. These expectations are current at a time when governments state that they are financially less able to meet these expectations.

Governments are requiring increased 'user-pay' services and are placing increased reliance on independent 'self-help' or 'mutual-aid' programs. This is happening at a time when people's capacity to help themselves or each other is reduced because of social and economic circumstances, including the decline in the primary industries and the increase in unemployment. The expectations are being formed and reinforced by exposure to media, mobility of families and the governments' own policies of access, equity, and social justice.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the author set out to explore the potential barriers to the successful implementation of policy in the remote communities of northern Australia.

There is no intention to suggest this paper is a comprehensive or definitive study; it rather aims to inform the interested reader, by way of an exploration, of the complexity of some key issues which potentially impede the implementation of policy in the remote areas.

It became clear potential barriers may not only act independently, but are also dynamically inter- and intra- acting. There potential barriers existing within the context or environment of remote areas, and specific barriers arising from the policy implementation itself.

The contextual barriers in remote area communities may stem from:-

- the conflict or competition in policy goals;
- the diversity of community management structures;
- the sparsity of populations and their interpersonal relationships;
- the geography of the remote areas and its sense of remoteness; and
- the nature of time and confidentiality.

The specific potential barriers may lie within:-

- the policy delivery staff;
- the transport issues (for service provision staff and/or clients);
- remote areas communications;
- the choice of mode of service delivery, & the level of decision making available;
- the community resources and infrastructure;
- the time constraints; or in,
- the assumptions & expectations of implementers & beneficiaries.

Things are different in the bush and these differences must be taken into account if policy implementation is to succeed.

Sound policy can be successfully implemented in remote areas; but is dependent on how conscientiously implementers recognise and address the potential barriers.

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