



ICV's Approach to Human and Community Development

Introduction

The following are some of the key ideas summarising ICV's approach to human and community development.

Community

There are many different types of communities. For many people, the concept of 'community' is a discrete location. Communities are not just places. There can be communities of 'interest'. Groups of people with shared interests or challenges.

We work with individuals and families, not just the traditional 'community' concept. We approach the idea of 'community' with realism, not idealism or romanticism. Not all communities are united. Local communities can be cohesive, divided or invisible. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities exist within urban settings, independent of those setting and conceptually rather than physically. For example, there is a vibrant Torres Strait Islander community in Canberra. We build our understanding of communities on facts and honesty.

The concept of 'human' development is as important as 'community' development. We work with individuals, families and businesses.

Asset Based Development

ICV takes an 'asset' rather than 'deficit' approach to development. Good community and human development identifies and connects existing assets.

All communities have assets that they can harness. We are honest about deficits but acknowledge the evidence about the effectiveness of strength-based approaches to community and human development. We work with communities to enable them to recognise, map and connect their assets. ICV helps to identify and leverage assets and opportunities that are available to communities. Effective community development builds networks between assets.

Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Community Leadership

Strong local leadership can have a positive effect on communities. We support and encourage good leadership. It is important to acknowledge local leadership strengths and build on these.

Good community development does not by-pass leaders, even if they are leading people down the wrong track. We help leaders to get themselves and their communities back on track. We recognise the value of local leadership mechanisms. We respect and support these. Traditional ways and leadership are important in many communities. ICV is aware of the tensions and ideological clashes between traditional and mainstream values and practices. We acknowledge the history of colonialism and avoid neo-colonial practices and values.

Community Participation

Community and human development requires the identification of people's aspirations. Local participation is essential if we are to achieve real and lasting results. Our project officers work in the field and engage in meaningful, respectful and honest dialogue with communities. They look, listen and learn.

A community needs a shared vision for the future and have real ownership. ICV facilitates this process, but we do not drive it. We ensure that we are doing things 'with' rather than 'to' or 'for' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Communities want us to invest 'with' them and 'in' their future.

Development

Development is a continuous process. The processes leading to the outcome are important for sustainability. Strengths-based approaches create the transformation necessary to move from welfare to wellbeing.

The transformation is not only within communities. ICV is transforming Australian society. Our partnership approach is an example of how Australia can be. As well as our direct community and human development work, we are being the change that Australian society needs.

We believe strongly in the importance of bottom-up and grassroots approaches. We begin with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where people are. We help people to adapt existing resources to meet their needs – we do not reinvent the wheel.

Long Term and Active

Effective community and human development requires us to observe and listen. We 'listen' rather than 'preach'. The first thing we need to do in communities is look, listen and learn. We engage with communities to help them explore and refine options for a better future. We are careful not to import our own assumptions into communities.

Community development builds on local strengths and knowledge. Communities have the best answers to their own problems and challenges. Local people can generate the best solutions to their own local issues. We help them draw these out.

Communities need to own their development agenda if it is to be sustainable. Our practices are participatory and inclusive. Community ownership of the process is criteria to the success of their programs.

Many of the challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are trans-generational. There are no quick fixes. Local communication processes are complicated and can take time. ICV makes long-term commitments and give communities the time they need to engage with us. ICV's staff and volunteers know that they have the time to work with communities at their speed. A short-term project may be an entry point for a longer-term development relationship with a community.

Building Relationships

We recognise that all our community and human development efforts are multi-dimensional. A project with a health focus, for example, will have other social and economic benefits. We assist communities to identify and harness these synergies. Many relationships interconnect in community and human development. These relationships can include community members, government business and non government organisations such as the churches.

ICV helps connect and strengthen these relations. ICV finds, shares and connects diverse knowledge, expertise and resources. ICV's relationship with communities is respectful. ICV helps to resolve conflict and not be part of it.

Analysis and Understanding

Community analysis and understanding are critical. Community development can begin with something as simple as a picture of where a community wants to be. ICV takes the time needed to build and implement this picture with communities. We take incremental steps and achieve early successes to win confidence.

We work with communities to help them plan for the future and target their energies and investments. We recognise the importance of communities having a shared vision for the future and the particular value of process that communities go through to achieve this consensus. We support communities to develop and implement their own plans. We give them time to do this.