

### **PARTICIPATION AND GOVERNANCE (CHAPTER 3)**

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate:

- definitions of autonomy and self-determination in an Indigenous context
- importance of self-determination and autonomy to the identity of Indigenous individuals and communities
- Indigenous movement towards self-determination and autonomy through governance and enterprise
- establishment of early Indigenous organisations, and the types of Aboriginal organisations that now exist (for example, community-based, cultural, employment, medical and legal services)
- types and diversity of Indigenous enterprises in areas such as land development, tourism, and community services
- contribution of Indigenous Australians to wider Australian society
- importance of Indigenous people operating their own organisations and enterprises.

## **BACKGROUND MATERIAL AND INTERPRETATION FOR TEACHERS**

### **About the chapter**

'Participation and Governance' emphasises the importance of self-determination and autonomy to the self-esteem and sense of identity to Indigenous individuals and communities.

It also illustrates the importance of self-determination and autonomy to all aspects of Indigenous people's participation, both nationally and internationally. Students explore the activities of organisations, movements and individuals who have and who are working towards Indigenous autonomy through education, enterprise, political and community leadership.

The demand for justice and equality by Australia's Indigenous people has been a long, hard struggle. It has only been fairly recently that Indigenous people have begun to gain control over decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities. Indigenous individuals and organisations are committed to creating the economic, social, cultural and legal framework that will enable them to be able to determine and manage their own lives and futures.

Autonomy is achieved through education and employment, and having community organisations run by Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous people need to recognise and respect this. Also important is the recognition that Indigenous Australians make an enormous contribution to the wider Australian community. In the process of working towards cultural autonomy, through their leadership and enterprise, Indigenous Australians have contributed to the social, political and economic landscape of the wider Australian community.

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy means different things to different people, with definitions variously focusing on political/structural, economic and cultural themes.

'Autonomy' is commonly used to mean greater self-government within Australia. Some people consider that autonomy means more say in decisions about resources in the region. Others concentrate on the separateness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a distinct culture.

### **Self-determination as the way to autonomy**

The principle of self-determination is an important principle in Indigenous communities and can be seen as a means of achieving Indigenous autonomy. If autonomy is seen as 'the right to act independently and self-govern', then self-determination is the action of acting independently; people having substantive power in their own affairs and responsibility for themselves.

Non-Indigenous Australians should recognise that the overwhelming number of them have charge of their own lives in ways that many Indigenous Australians lack. For

example, the Australian government intervention in the Northern Territory, suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act, and changes to the permit system. Self-determination is based on the idea that Indigenous people themselves are the most appropriate people to determine the needs of their communities and should have greater control over their own futures as they seek to keep their identities, cultures and traditions alive.

Self-determination is reflected in:

- The establishment of Indigenous legal, health and other community services that understand, and cater to, specific cultural protocols and needs.
- The power to elect Indigenous authorities according to traditions and customs, and to promote customary judicial systems and mechanisms of conflict resolution.
- The right to be consulted prior to, and freely, in all the economic, social, administrative and legal projects that affect the lives of Indigenous communities and cultures.
- The right to express consent or objections to plans and projects that affect Indigenous communities, such as policies regarding land and territory, education, healthcare, productive projects, exploration and exploitation of resources.
- The right to recognition of native title.

#### **Self determination through Indigenous community services**

The delivery of services through Indigenous community organisations and programs is the most appropriate and effective way to tackle the social, economic and political disadvantage in Indigenous communities. They not only provide employment and training for local people, they offer culturally appropriate services and information, often in the community's language. These community services include clinics and health programs, workforce development, housing incentives and education.

Since the early 1970s, there has been a growth of community-controlled services in Australia. Generally, these have proved more successful than organisations created by government. Because there are insufficient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the appropriate skills to carry out all the legal, accounting and administrative functions, some employ non-Indigenous people. This is especially true in the area of land rights and native title, the latter of which is highly legalistic. Nevertheless, where possible, they maintain strong Aboriginal management and control.

There are many examples of community-based organisations in the book.

#### **Self determination through self-government**

Self-government does not relate to setting up a separate state. Aboriginal leaders have spoken overwhelmingly of their wish to contribute to Australia. Self-government applies to social authority patterns, land rights issues and the role of senior people in the community.

#### **Self-determination through enterprise**

Development and control of the economy is essential to building a financial base for self-governance. There is a high correlation between a community's degree of economic control and the health of the economy, on one hand, and the level of self-

governance exercised on the other hand. Lack of local control over the economy, a weak economy and a low level of autonomy go hand in hand.

Community enterprises contribute to local employment and economic independence. Indigenous people identify the essential role sustainable economic development plays in community independence, cultural maintenance, self-esteem and economic independence.

**Self-determination through participating in decisions about the exploitation of natural resources**

Control over natural resources is an important factor in controlling a community or country's economy and environmental integrity. To some degree, mining exploration (uranium, iron ore, gas field etc.) can be at odds with Indigenous conceptions of custodianship over country. However, where they are able to enter into fair contracts, stipulate the conditions and ensure that the training and employment of Indigenous people is a part of the contract, these activities can be a powerful source of wealth for many Indigenous communities, especially in remote areas. See for example [www.ngarda.com.au](http://www.ngarda.com.au).

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After reading the chapter 'Participation and Governance' and completing the activities in these notes, students should be able to do the following:

- a) Explain the importance of self-determination and autonomy to all aspects of Indigenous peoples' participation nationally and internationally
- b) Explore the concept and importance of self-management, and explains why it is important for Indigenous people and others to be involved in decisions about strategies to deal with issues affecting their lives
- c) Evaluate the effects of colonisation on Indigenous people's autonomy through:
  - the lack of acknowledgement and acceptance by colonists of the autonomous nature of traditional societies
  - inability to perform roles critical to an autonomous society
  - introduction of, and forced reliance on, welfare.
- d) identify and give reasons for the establishment of Indigenous community organisations
- e) evaluate the advantages of Indigenous control over Indigenous organisations and enterprises such as:
  - provision of culturally appropriate services
  - understanding of the needs of the communities they service
  - Indigenous control over Indigenous affairs
  - employment and training in culturally appropriate settings.
- f) Explain the importance of land and the interrelationship between land and culture for Indigenous people
- g) Use a variety of sources, including the internet, to research and describe a variety of Indigenous organisations, including their roles in the struggle for the return of autonomy.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### Teacher-led activity

Before reading the chapter, students should have a clear idea about the definitions of autonomy and self-determination. Students should browse ABC TV's Message Stick website, Local Heroes, <[http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/local\\_heroes/](http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/local_heroes/)>.

### Questions for class discussion during the reading

#### Education

- Why is education important for the future of young Indigenous Australians?
- What is bilingual education? What is the argument for bilingual education?
- What are the benefits, do you think, for Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous students learning an Indigenous language?

#### Employment

- What are some of the factors that have become barriers to employment for Indigenous people?
- What, other than income, are some of the benefits of being employed – for individuals, families and communities?
- What are some of the initiatives improving employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians?
- What is autonomy? Why is it important? How are these initiatives and enterprises improving Indigenous autonomy in Australia?
- How can education and training contribute to Indigenous autonomy?

#### A heritage of leadership

- Name some of Australia's Indigenous leaders mentioned in the text. Are there any other you can think of? What have they contributed to their community, or do they contribute now? Are well-known warriors and fighters like Jandamara of the Bunuba people; Nyoongar man, Yagun; Bussamarai; Calyute (also Kalyute, Galyute or Wongir); and Pemulwuy also leaders?
- Who is David Unaipon?

#### War service

- In what ways did Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people contribute to the Australian war effort?
- How has Australia benefited from the Indigenous war service?
- Why do you think Indigenous Australians were allowed to fight in wars, but were denied the same rights of other returned servicemen?

#### Making decisions for our communities

- What is Reconciliation Australia's philosophy on decision-making?
- What is the crucial factor in any program aimed at improving health, education and employment?
- What are some of the ways that communities are managing and delivering their own services?

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1

*This activity gives students the opportunity to investigate the ways in which Indigenous communities are working towards independence and autonomy and providing opportunities for their people. This activity is also intended to remedy preconceived ideas that students may have about Indigenous lack of employment.*

Students visit the following sites to gain a sense of the volume and diversity of Indigenous enterprise:

Indigenous Business Australia, [www.iba.gov.au/](http://www.iba.gov.au/)

Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, [www.orac.gov.au/](http://www.orac.gov.au/)

Indigenous Stock Exchange, [www.isx.org.au](http://www.isx.org.au)

Students then choose an organisation from one of these websites and write a short profile of the organisation. (They may need to browse a few in order to find one that provides sufficient information.) They must include how the organisation is contributing to its community and why such a business is valuable to Australia. Students write a profile of an Indigenous business or enterprise. In this profile they should include the nature of the business, its history and how the organisation contributes to its community and Indigenous autonomy. Students may like to combine their profiles and put together a 'Red, Yellow Black pages' of Indigenous businesses as a class project.

### Note to teachers:

Read the following articles and provide students with a summary of the information presented in them so that students have an understanding of the importance of Indigenous enterprises and the roles they play in Indigenous autonomy and self-determination:

Philanthropy, non-government organisations and Indigenous development,  
[http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/DP/2002\\_DP242.pdf](http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/DP/2002_DP242.pdf)

Are we overcoming Indigenous disadvantage?  
<http://www.pc.gov.au/speeches/cs20090707-overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage>

Indigenous Australian entrepreneurs: Not all community organisations, not all in the outback,  
[http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/DP/2006\\_DP279.pdf](http://caepr.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/Publications/DP/2006_DP279.pdf)

### Activity 2

*This activity gives students the opportunity to investigate the contribution that Indigenous individuals have given to the wider Australian community.*

Students are to write curriculum vitae of an Indigenous leader – either one listed in the book, or one found through personal experience or research.

The format should include the individual's name; community or language group, if available; a brief biography; work history, as well as additional information such as activism; publications; films; and contributions to society and their community.

### Note to teachers:

Students should be encouraged to think beyond the most obvious Indigenous leaders such as Koiki (Eddie) Mabo or David Unaipon. As with the wider community, some of the most effective leaders are those who work at the community level, and who may not be well known to a wide audience via public appearances. Often these people are

women. It may also be necessary to remind students that sportspeople, though they are very inspiring, are not necessarily 'leaders'.

This activity can also be seen as an exercise in using discretion and good judgment when consulting sources in their research. Students should always ask themselves who wrote the article/document and what their agenda was in doing so.

Some of the leaders that students can consider researching and writing about include:

Shirley Smith (Mum Shirl)	Aden Ridgeway
Mick Dodson	Ernie Bridge
Patrick Dodson	Neville Bonner
Galarwuy Yunupingu	Carol Martin
Mandawuy Yunupingu	Marcia Langton
Lowjita (Lois) O'Donoghue	Vincent Lingiari
Koiki (Eddie) Mabo	Yvonne Margarula
Burnum Burnum	Michael Mansell
Charles Perkins	William Barak
Marion Scrymgour	Pearl Gibbs
Warren Mundine	Oodgeroo Noonuccal