



**NINTI ONE** : **CRC** **REMOTE ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION**

## CRC-REP Project Initiation

### Philosophy

During the life of the CRC-REP, many accomplished researchers, project managers and other skilled professionals from many types of institutions will be involved in its projects. This document provides some orientation to the work of the CRC and is a guide so that diverse collaborators can use common project initiation processes.

#### CRC for Remote Economic Participation

Ninti One Limited ABN 28 106 610 833

PO Box 3971

Alice Springs NT 0871

**P** (08) 8959 6000

**F** (08) 8959 6048

**W** [www.crc-rep.com.au](http://www.crc-rep.com.au)

A large number of the research projects being undertaken by CRC-REP will use the participatory action research process because the nature of the problems being investigated require the involvement of all relevant stakeholders to identify the problem and define new improved futures. In the participatory action research process, potential barriers to application of research results come to light and the research may be modified to suit the actual circumstances of the target individuals. Who knows those circumstances better than the individuals concerned? Listening to the insiders, being led and guided by them, improves the relevance, applicability and uptake of results. The relationship with insiders brings powers to visualise and realise the desired research outcomes beyond those of the researchers alone. Science is strengthened when insiders' long observation and in-depth knowledge of the study question are considered.

Participatory action research necessitates more discussion with more people than traditional research would entail. In requiring participatory processes of research design, implementation and evaluation, the CRC-REP anticipates resourcing those additional transaction costs. The time and funding for participatory processes must be built into the project plan and budget. Ninti One and CRC-REP personnel experienced in participatory research are available to support Project Managers in the use of participatory processes.

Broad-based stakeholder involvement in assessments for diagnosis, monitoring and evaluation of the state of resources and human communities improves the accuracy of those assessments and enables those stakeholders to recognise and respond to environmental and social feedback. Thus participatory action research builds capacity for both insiders and outsiders, and contributes to attaining the ultimate goal both by providing new information, products, or processes and by expanding capacity to use that innovation. Stakeholder involvement and "buy-in" or ownership is necessary for identifying acceptable trade-offs, negotiating distributions of costs and benefits, and reaching consensus about research findings and recommendations. In short, we advocate this research approach because it builds the basis for individual and collective action in doing and using research.

More than specific techniques or procedures, participatory action research embodies an **attitude** that recognises the primacy of the intended beneficiaries and respects the perspectives and knowledge that those people and the larger body of stakeholders bring to the research.

### Project initiation process within a participatory framework

With stakeholders, the research themes and project areas for CRC-REP have already been broadly defined. Stakeholder input is reflected in the CRC bid document and in the Agreements with the Commonwealth and CRC-REP partners about the research areas to be addressed and projects that are funded. The work before General Managers and Principal Research Leaders now is to refresh relationships and perspectives of participating stakeholders, insiders and outsiders, and with them, to develop and agree upon specific programs of action to realise the previously scoped research programs and projects.

Following a review of the current statement of the project's goals and objectives, a logical first question for the General Managers and Principal Research Leaders is, "Who are the **intended beneficiaries**?" While these targets are the primary stakeholders, they are one group among many with some stake in the project (the base of Figure 1). At this stage, identifications are preliminary. Target and stakeholder identification are iterative as the project unfolds. For example, if the project goal is to benefit remote communities through carbon trading, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with appropriate land resources, adequate governance and resource management capacity may be initial targets for participation. Those nearest to the researchers' base may be preferred for logistical efficiency. As more is understood about the varying conditions over the remote Australian land base and the potential of semi-arid land and vegetation to sequester carbon, the research may be extended to other locales held by additional communities or managed under other tenures.

As well as the people the research is intended to benefit directly, there are other end-users of the research. For the example above, these might include non-Aboriginal private and public land managers, non-project researchers investigating topics related to those of the project, and policy-makers developing an Australian emissions trading scheme. The project manager should conduct a preliminary **stakeholder analysis**<sup>1</sup> to identify those with an interest in the research, what their stake might be, and therefore how they might be engaged to participate. As these people are brought in to discussions around the project, additional stakeholders will be identified and again, this process will be iterative throughout the life of the project. The CRC-REP aims to be inclusive of those potentially affected by the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Just one of many possible sources: Rietbergen-McCracken J and Narayan D. 1998. Stakeholder Analysis. In *Participation and Social Assessment: Tools and Techniques*. J Reitbergen-McCracken and D Narayan, compilers. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank, Washington, USA, pp. 65-71.



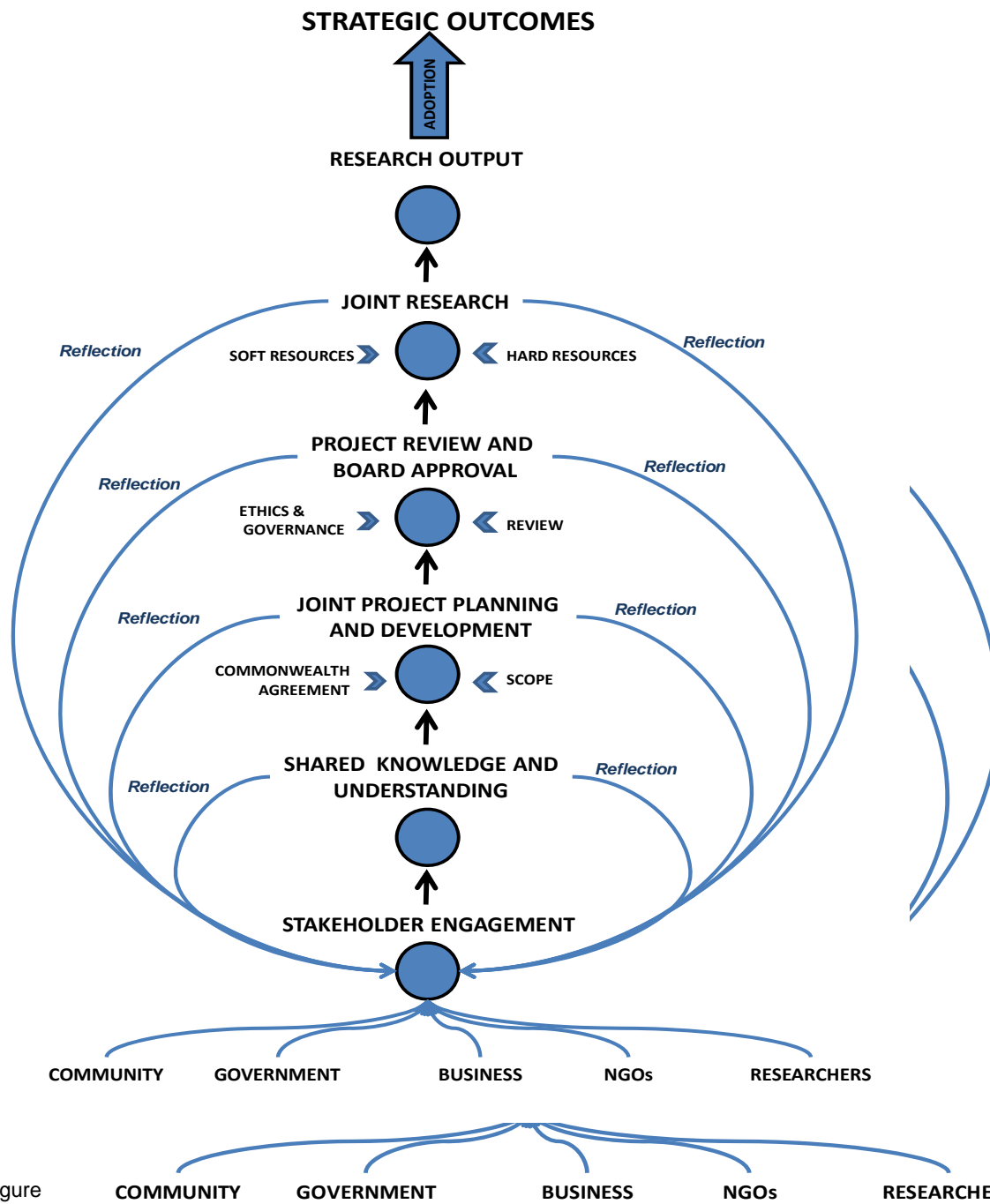


Figure COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NGOs RESEARCHERS

A **plan for stakeholder engagement** (also called social mobilisation) will be needed. In all our interactions we ensure high levels of respect for different cultures.<sup>3</sup> Attracting and retaining meaningful participation requires purposeful activity,

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from PCD. 2006. *Introduction to Jalay's Praxis*. Participatory Corporate Development Pty Ltd, Queensland.

<sup>3</sup> This includes respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where we have an extensive set of resources for ensuring appropriate engagement and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Intellectual Property. Such respect also applies to other cultures and sub-cultures.

and sometimes, some form of incentive. In many cases, insiders must be mobilised to speak and act in their own interests. Mobilisation begins with awareness of the project, usually through direct contact with it. Contact may be at any stage of the project, but is generally needed early in the planning phase. People can be drawn to participate based on information that appeals to their self-interest. They are drawn to act if they believe that by doing so they can improve their condition. Ask yourself what the project will do for the participants and what it seeks from them in return. Is the reward commensurate with the time, attention and effort asked of the participants? The engagement plan should specify how people will be contacted and by whom, what information will be shared with them at the outset, what their participation might ultimately be, and what the perceived costs and benefits of their participation will be. In other words, participants should be in a position to give 'Prior Informed Consent'.<sup>4</sup>

The project manager needs an **initial conception** of the project to begin scoping the expertise needed to realise the research goals. This initial conception should be canvassed with the now-identified stakeholders, both internal (the General Managers and Principal Research Leaders and other CRC-REP and Ninti One personnel) and external, to develop a **project plan**. The Principal Research Leaders listen for participants' priorities, potential barriers or risks to research progress and completion, conflicts among stakeholders, sub-agenda, and opportunities for the research to bring benefit in previously unforeseen ways. This canvassing of the initial project conception may be a structured process like a **log-frame analysis**<sup>5</sup>, in which options for addressing project goals are systematically evaluated and goals are logically linked to intermediate outcomes and outputs. Such a systematic analysis identifies indicators of progress toward objectives and goals and how these will be measured and verified. The log-frame approach maps a **pathway to the desired project impact**. Alternatively, project planning can be pursued with stakeholders in any number of workshop approaches but the plan must make concrete the linkages among the project components (e.g. stakeholder analysis; stakeholder engagement; research activities; communication, dissemination and application of results) and the desired impact.

Clear, mutual goals have been shown to contribute to project success in international development. As an overview, the project plan should state<sup>6</sup>:

- Goals, objectives, intended beneficiaries
- Contribution of the project to the CRC-REP goals and milestones
- Partners, stakeholders, and their roles
- Strategy for achieving the goals, including stakeholder engagement, research methods and project activities
- How the project strategy, components and activities are linked to achieve the intermediate and ultimate project goals, or its pathway to impact
- How the project will be governed
- Potential risks to the project
- Potential risks of the project, whether environmental or social
- How progress and effectiveness will be monitored and evaluated
- How the results will be disseminated
- Milestones and project timeline, including reporting schedule.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://mail.nintione.com.au:81/webdrawer/rec/5810/view/DKCRC-SS-BP7-Free-Prior-Informed-Consent.PDF>

<sup>5</sup> Again, many sources, such as: Commonwealth of Australia 2005. *The Logical Framework Approach*. Available as pdf online at [www.usaid.gov/ausguide/pdf/ausguideline3.3pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/ausguide/pdf/ausguideline3.3pdf) or see The World Bank, n.d. *The LogFrame Handbook: A Logical Framework Approach to Project Cycle Management*. The World Bank, Washington, USA.

<sup>6</sup> A project proposal document is available to structure this.

Each project represents a strategic contribution to the direction and achievement of the overall goals of the CRC-REP. The project plan should indicate how the individual project advances the overall CRC-REP goals and suggest potential linkages and possible shared resources (including data) among projects.

*Participation must be developed around clearly specified rights, roles and responsibilities.* Internal and external stakeholders must negotiate how control or ownership of the research process will be managed. **Project governance** must be addressed in the project plan. Specified governance assists the structuring and organisation of the research process. Governance includes decision-making methods, rules of behaviour for researchers and all participants, mechanisms of accountability, and scheduled activities in which governance and relations among insiders and outsiders and among all participants are examined. “Research programmes that do not include organisational learning about relationships among researchers and the people whose resource or community management practices are under study run into serious difficulties.”<sup>7</sup> Keeping project relationships healthy underpins research quality and effectiveness.

Project **monitoring and evaluation** needs to be planned from the start so that any necessary baseline data can be collected before other activities commence. A timeline for the project activities with project **milestones** is essential. A **Gantt chart** (a graphical representation of the duration of tasks against the progression of time) could be used for this purpose.

At this stage, the Principal Research Leader can identify project beneficiaries and stakeholders, has an indication of the essential and other partners who will conduct the research, and has a draft project plan developed in collaboration with beneficiaries and stakeholders. The draft project plan is reviewed internally with the Ninti One General Managers and then returned to the beneficiaries and broader stakeholders for **review and validation**. The Principal Research Leader is asking, “Did I get this right? Have I captured what you told me?” If the project is to succeed in meeting the goal of improving peoples’ lives, the people must own it. It is *their* project. The validation step may be formal and highly structured or it may be a simple roundtable with key stakeholders and partners. A more formal process is recommended for highly complex projects or where stake conflicts must be addressed.

Once the stakeholders have accepted the project plan, it is subjected to **peer review**. Reviewers should be selected to examine the science or technical research content, the plan for application of results, and the project structure and governance. The next stage is for the project to complete an **ethics review**, which may be by a University Ethics Committee or a similar committee within a professional body. Once project plans are substantially complete and feedback from peer and ethics reviews has been addressed, the **CRC-REP Board reviews the plans** for approval or modification. Stakeholders should be kept apprised of changes to the project plan resulting from these reviews.

Among the tasks of the Principal Research Leader is to recruit necessary staff, working through the CRC-REP partnership network as applicable. As **the project team is formed**, the Principal Research Leader ensures that they are aware of the policies and procedures of the CRC-REP, that health and safety practices are in place and understood, and that insurance is in place to adequately indemnify the partners and to protect employees and property.

Effective project management entails **consultation with stakeholders throughout** the life of the project. Informal consultation is encouraged when the Principal Research Leader is accessible to stakeholders, aware of factors influencing their participation, and responsive to feedback. These considerations apply to all project staff.

As the project is developed and implemented, the Principal Research Leader prepares **quarterly progress reports** submitted to the Ninti One General Managers Research. These reports briefly describe that quarter’s activities;

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<sup>7</sup> A great reference for participatory projects. Pound B, Snapp S, McDougall C and Braun A (Eds). 2003. *Managing Natural Resources for Sustainable Livelihoods: Uniting Science and Participation*. Earthscan, London. (The quoted section is from p. 4).

milestones scheduled and whether achieved; issues arising, changes in participant relationships or status or significant events; and any proposed modifications to the project plan. These reports are intended to give the General Managers Research a feel for how the project is unfolding and progressing and will be 1–2 pages. If circumstances require additional explanation, that is fine. The General Managers Research is available as a sounding board and guide and the Principal Research Leader should communicate as needed at any time. The progress reports may also represent an opportunity for regular consultation with stakeholders and course correction as necessary with whatever governance structure(s) the project establishes.

## **In summary**

Research, training, and the testing and application of these in enterprise development, resource management, community governance and so on must result in social change if benefits are to endure. This social change comes from enforcing a dynamic in which the relatively less empowered are brought to the fore in partnership with the more empowered. The insiders give the direction: what it is that will benefit them cannot be decided by outsiders. The roles of the outsiders lie in helping the insiders formulate their own questions and create their own information, supplementing their knowledge and bringing resources from beyond the community to advance the processes of research and social change. Participatory methods encourage and strengthen the insiders' existing abilities to identify their own needs and objectives and to measure delivery against their own evaluation criteria.

Research questions and approaches are formulated by stakeholders with researchers and recorded in the project plan. Data collection, processing, analysis, interpretation and application involve relevant stakeholders, capture their perspectives and knowledge relative to the project, improve their analytic capacity, advance their understanding of the situation under examination, and provide them with a basis for action.

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