Research Snapshot

CULTURAL MARKET SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT THE INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY

Knowledge for Country,
culture, people and community

Acknowledgement of Country. We acknowledge the Land, Fresh Water & Sea Country of all areas where we connect, share & learn, and pay our respects to elders past, present & emerging. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised this document may contain images of people who have passed away.



Across 35+ remote communities of Northern Australia, CMSD found a readiness on Country to change the narrative.

People often counted as “not in the labour force” or “not yet job ready” hold the willingness and capacity to supply knowledge services to a paying market of visitors to Country — if offered the opportunity.

Over 2.5 years, Indigenous Connection (IC) sat down with senior leaders of land and lore, employed Cultural Knowledge Providers (CKPs), and met with more than 300 people across government and corporate Australia to understand how market systems work — and where they don’t — on Country.

The research applies a Market Systems Development lens, a localised Human Development Index and IC’s new place-based Cultural Market Systems Development-Index (CMSD-I).

Nationally, approximately $6b of government and philanthropic time, money and effort is invested each year to improve the lives of First Nations people. Yet in remote communities, Closing the Gap reporting shows wellbeing outcomes are not shifting at the scale required. CMSD finds that participation is shaped less by people on Country and more by the systems around them. Two root causes stand out: systemic exclusion and infrastructure insecurity.

AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY EXISTS. THE VEHICLE TO CREATE SYSTEMIC INCLUSION AT SCALE IS KNOWLEDGE SERVICES.

THE CRITICAL FIRST STEP: RETHINKING BUSINESS-AS-USUAL.

Indigenous Connection is the Cultural Intelligence Partner to institutions who want to hear the voice of Country, culture, people and community.

Funded by CRCNA

In-kind support
NAB Group Economics

Are you driving inclusion
in your area? Let’s connect:

info@indigenousconnection.com
indigenousconnection.com

Download the full CMSD paper.
Scan the QR code to read the research, methodology and recommendations in full.



"We invite government and corporate people to open up the space for our thinking, and our voice to be heard. It is not pushing your system away, it is bringing your system there to work with our system."

Ian Mongunu Gumbula
Senior Yolŋu Leader, Galiwin'ku
IC Cultural Knowledge Provider
PhD Candidate

140+

AN OVERWHELMING YES

Senior Leaders across 35+ communities were asked: "Would you like IC to operate on Country?" Every community engaged endorsed IC within 12 months, then co-designed its own strategy.

80+

CKPs EMPLOYED

and 130 more expressions of interest. Willingness was so strong IC paused hiring to focus on the demand side.

10-20H

THE DREAM JOB

Per week, on Country, using knowledge for Country, culture, people and community — what newly onboarded CKPs told IC. (Small sample; diverse voices across regions.)

PARTICIPATION IS SHAPED BY SYSTEMS, NOT A LACK OF WILLINGNESS.

PEOPLE ON COUNTRY WANT TO SHARE THEIR VOICE WITH INSTITUTIONAL AUSTRALIA

REMOTE AUSTRALIA'S DEVELOPMENT STORY

.958 vs .7385

Australia HDI 2023 vs. Remote (IC est.). A developed nation on average —with developing-economy conditions on Country that national averages can mask.

IC'S FUTURE SCENARIO MODEL

WHAT COULD BE POSSIBLE ON COUNTRY?

1. CREATE SYSTEMS CHANGE (EXAMPLE)

50%	of housing demand met, via infrastructure security
40%	of labour force in the cultural economy
12	hrs per week, knowledge services

2. IMPACT ON COUNTRY* ONE SCENARIO, REMOTE WA, NT & QLD

11,096	new jobs on Country, culturally and context aligned
44,384	hours of cross- cultural human interaction and reconciliation, every week
~$250m	estimated annual reduction in welfare costs and ~$5b over 20+ years

$900/wk	Median personal income	Baseline $318
17%	Overcrowded housing	Baseline 34%
63%	School attendance	Baseline 59%
0.74	CMSD-Index	Baseline 0.56
0.79	Human Dev. Index	Baseline 0.75

HOW DO WE HEAR THE VOICE OF VULNERABLE CUSTOMERS ON COUNTRY?

1. Build situational awareness
2. Build context alignment
3. Define a relationship vision
4. Rethink business-as-usual

*The model is not a forecast. It uses proxies informed by CMSD data and findings to share a vision of what redesigned market systems could achieve; outputs should not be relied on alone for decision-making.

Important information
This snapshot summarises *Cultural Market Systems Development* (Indigenous Connection Pty Ltd, July 2026; ISBN 978-1-922437-87-7), funded by the Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA) under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centres Program, with investment partners the WA, NT and QLD Governments. Opinions are those of the authors and do not purport to reflect the views of the CRCNA or its partners. Figures are drawn from IC primary research and secondary sources (including ABS, NT Government and the Productivity Commission) that IC has not independently audited. Statistical relationships reported in the paper are associations, not proof of causation. Future Scenario Model outputs are illustrative, use proxies and are not predictions. Disclosure: Indigenous Connection is a majority Indigenous-owned social enterprise that operates a paid, consent-governed market for Cultural Knowledge Services and holds a potential commercial interest in the paper's recommendations; readers are encouraged to assess the evidence on its merits. Authorship and licence: The research was undertaken and authored by Indigenous Connection Pty Ltd (author: Brad Martin; contributor: Prajwal Niroula). This snapshot summarises and adapts the paper, which is licensed under CC BY 4.0 (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0); attribute the CRCNA as the source. Photographs, the Indigenous Connection logo and design elements are not covered by this licence. Read the full paper for methodology, limitations and references.