

# **Training and community involvement: perspectives of remote builders in Australia's Northern Territory**

## **Summary Paper**

Thomas Paul Williamson

Faculty of Science and Technology, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia  
thomas.williamson@students.cdu.edu.au

Ali Rajabipour

Faculty of Science and Technology, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia  
ali.rajabipour@cdu.edu.au

Cat Kutay

Faculty of Science and Technology, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia  
cat.kutay@cdu.edu.au

Graham Gust

Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, Northern Territory Government, Darwin,  
Australia  
graham.gust@nt.gov.au

Mark Fudge

Tertiary and Further Education, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Australia  
mark.fudge@cdu.edu.au

**Keywords:** Builders' survey, Community involvement, Remote Aboriginal housing, Training for construction

## **1 TARGET AUDIENCE**

This paper is aimed at builders and engineers working on Aboriginal housing projects, particularly considering engagement of community on the project.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

We explore challenges in the construction of houses in remote communities in the Northern Territory from the perspective of remote builders. Many of these could be reduced by the involvement of local community members during the design and construction. At the same time, remote housing demand is high, and the under-resourcing of houses impacts health.

### **3 PURPOSE**

This research project evaluates ways to enhance community members' engagement in remote housing projects. Such enhancement involves both-way learning to improve the provision of, and engagement in, construction and training. We have focused this study on the perceptions and understanding of those builders who are active in remote areas. The work of builders has expanded, where they are now expected to train the community members. They engage unskilled people in the construction process, and the extent to which they are trained is up to the builder and not a construction trainer. At the same time, they are tasked with delivering several houses on time and on budget. This paper aims to discuss the challenges of construction and training in remote communities and ways to improve these.

### **5 METHOD**

Using existing literature, particularly government and consultant reports on housing issues, we collected likely issues. Then we interviewed builders who can provide further insight on the obstacles to potential training and involvement of community members during construction.

### **6 RESULTS**

Major challenges include differences in work ethic, language barriers, poor technical, numeracy and literacy skills, and lack of relationship between builders and communities. We found that due to these challenges, seven out of 10 participants believed that a change in construction techniques will not yield better community involvement. Further, it was noted that it is a challenge to involve community members in skilled and qualified trades, such as electrical and plumbing works, due to language, numeracy, and literary requirements. Other proposals were having a 'pipeline' of projects because of the greater opportunity for linking training to ongoing employment. The community members can develop skills and repeat these multiple times to improve competency. In terms of preferable construction methods for remote housing, the results show a concrete slab on ground will provide the best solution for the floor system due to the ability for community involvement and its longevity.

### **7 IMPLICATIONS FOR TARGET AUDIENCES**

A measure of the success of community involvement and training throughout the construction process can be done by setting staged goals for community members to achieve as they progress through a project. Northern Territory Government could improve on their side by setting training goals for the community members involved. This would give the builders a better understanding of the expectations for the employment of community members and allow for time and budgeting to accommodate their progress.