Four years ago Indigenous leaders from eight regions - remote, urban and regional - joined forces to drive a common reform agenda for Indigenous empowerment.

Their aim is to shift the Indigenous affairs paradigm from passive welfare and government overreach to empowerment of Indigenous families and individuals. They have designed a model that will tip the power balance between Indigenous People and Government, making Government work with and for Indigenous people to close social and economic disparity, and ensure that identities, languages and cultures are not lost.

A commitment to the goal of development – development that fosters empowerment – is central, supported by getting greater value and productivity from critical investment in Indigenous affairs.

This requires successfully connecting and cementing the work of Indigenous People locally in regions with supportive structural changes to Government systems.

It has to be done in a way that enables building capability, self-reliance, aspiration, opportunity and increased choice - that puts Indigenous People in the driver’s seat, with responsibility and decision making for their lives and development resting with them. While the EC vision is shared, the specific pathway to empowerment varies across regions to suit local circumstances.

Those who spearhead this movement have led reform in their own regions over many years. They now stand together, convinced that with the power of their collaboration they can shift the balance to Indigenous empowerment. It’s a ten year journey they are making with Governments and corporate Australia (through Jawun) as crucial partners.
Our regional vision

The Cape York region has 16 different Indigenous communities and over 40 languages. As we work closely with Indigenous communities across the Cape, a regional vision will emerge in a way that is right for us.

Empowered Communities (EC) is an opportunity to build a vision from the ground up with community, families, and individuals, not the usual suspects and organisations. At this stage, three Alliances from the communities of Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge have opted in to EC. Two more alliances at Mapoon and Lockhart River are forming as they continue to explore opting in.

Our pathway of empowerment

The three opt in communities have been at the forefront of demanding a shift that recognises that Indigenous People are inherently capable of overcoming the corrosive effects of passive welfare. They are proudly continuing to lead the reform agenda on Cape York under Empowered Communities (EC).

Those people participating in each community have established Local Alliances to improve participation in local decision making, and through these Alliances they have opted in. They are creating their own Local Development Agendas, setting out the priorities for their own communities in social, economic, cultural and health outcomes. They have been enabled with resources and support from the EC Cape York backbone.

Other communities engaged in EC are also building their Local Alliances and Local Development Agendas as they explore whether to opt in.

“They through empowerment, I believe the tide is coming in to create more [opportunities] for our people.”

Hope Vale 2017

Our development focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowerment priority</th>
<th>Our objectives</th>
<th>Community tells us</th>
<th>Data tells us</th>
<th>We don’t yet know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous People: Participate in education &amp; learning with parents involved</td>
<td>Education: Building educated &amp; confident young Indigenous People</td>
<td>We are starting to see the emergence of some strong themes and priorities from Local Alliances in our region focused predominantly on the future of our children. As Local Alliances articulate their Local Development Agendas over the next few months we will be able to share more details on objectives.</td>
<td>• Cape York Indigenous children are still substantially below the national average in school attendance and reading. • Nearly half of all working-aged Indigenous people in Cape York are, either not participating in the labour force, or unemployed. • Most Indigenous people in Cape York live in community or public housing. • Cape York Indigenous people are hospitalised for assault at 12 times the rate of non-Indigenous people</td>
<td>• How many of our young people transition effectively from primary school to high school and high school to jobs or further education? • How many jobs are available in Cape York and how many are awarded to Indigenous people? Why? • How much time do our people spend in training before finding work with a purpose? • How many of our people are not participating in the labour force? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for children &amp; other vulnerable people</td>
<td>Family Safety: Caring for our children, elders &amp; family members with a disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in work or training</td>
<td>Work &amp; Training, Income &amp; Employment: Working life with a purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have stable housing and aspire to home ownership</td>
<td>Housing &amp; Homes: Building homes &amp; our legacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live in safe communities with rights respected under the law &amp; the community’s values</td>
<td>Health: Living longer &amp; healthier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Safe Communities: Reducing alcohol related violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language &amp; Culture: Thriving traditions in modern times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Governance &amp; Leadership: Empowering Our Region, Our People, Our Leaders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our journey so far

2014
Targeted engagement process across all Cape York communities implemented with a series of briefings and design workshops with Cape York Regional Organisations, other key leaders and stakeholders.

2015
Extensive engagement of Cape York communities and Indigenous leadership through community-based information sessions and briefings and a Regional Summit in Cairns in May 2015.

2016
Regional Cape York backbone funding received

2016
Activating Local Alliances and opt in communities through intensive collaborative development processes with local people & places.
What we’ve done so far
The past 12 months has ensured all Cape York communities are informed about EC. In addition, where requested, an intensive collaborative development process has enabled Indigenous people to build their Local Alliances and Local Development Agendas. This process is broad and inclusive.

Whilst building their Local Development Agendas over the past 15 months, communities have also worked on real-time issues resolution and implemented short-term actions establishing Indigenous leadership on policy and programs for their community. Local Alliances have also requested data and research to better understand the current state of their community and inform their Local Development Agendas.

Key achievements
- Empowered Communities Cape York Backbone established
- Five Cape York Indigenous communities working through Local Alliances collaborating on the development of Local Development Agendas
- Three Local Alliances have formally opted-in to Empowered Communities
- Empowered Communities Local Champions are engaging with their own community and developing their own Local Development Agendas
- Regional Leadership Group established and activated
- Regional Leadership Group embedding Local Development Agendas and driving emergence of first regional priorities

How we are working together
EC Cape York recognises the primacy of the local nature of Cape York peoples and places, and supports Cape York people championing change towards an Indigenous-led Empowerment policy framework based on Indigenous Australian’s right to development.

The evolving structure of EC Cape York illustrates the autonomy and connectedness of Indigenous Peoples in our region.

Regional Governance Structure

What are the changes we are starting to see...
- No change yet
- Shift scale: Small to Big shifts

What’s on the horizon
EC Cape York Regional Leadership Group is activating. The Regional Leadership Group is starting to consider whole-of-government investments for Cape York.

Local Indigenous community groups that have opted in are finalising their Local Development Agendas to inform regional first priority decisions. EC Cape York Local Champions continue to implement collaborative development processes and empower Indigenous people through experience in leading the agenda. There is growing understanding of the gap in available Indigenous data necessary for an evidence base.

“Really, it’s about understanding where we are. Are we up there, or are we down there? Where [do] we want to build?”
Coen 2017

Where we are up to
- Coen
- Hope Vale
- Mossman Gorge
- Regional

Enablers
- Decision making / empowerment
- Relationships & collaboration
- Working differently
- Skills for change

Now
Completion of formal opt in by Local Alliances from three communities, and ongoing design and finalisation of their Local Development Agendas. EC Cape York Regional Leadership Group activated and are commencing to collaboration on developing the Regional Development Agenda and agreements on regional priorities.
Where we are starting to see positive change

CASE STUDY 1
Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation & Coen People: Decision-making & empowerment

In Coen, young Indigenous parents would often have young children in the workplace after 12.00pm due to the early closure of day-care. The Coen Local Alliance realised that without information about child-care services and their needs, nothing would change. They decided to implement a feasibility study with enabling support from EC Cape York and Jawun. Through the process, the Coen Local Alliance learnt about researching the state of their own community and early child care and early development policy and funding.

CASE STUDY 2
Local Alliances: Relationships & collaboration

Where we started: Collaboration & shared decision making pre-EC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEPENDENT</th>
<th>COLLABORATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Across Opt Ins</td>
<td>Government with Opt Ins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where we are now: Emerging changes in how we are working:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEPENDENT</th>
<th>COLLABORATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Across Opt Ins</td>
<td>Government with Opt Ins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Collaboration strength assessments are based on EC CY Backbone feedback and for the others, they are based on EC participant feedback.

Once they had a clear understanding of the gap in existing child-care services in Coen and young working Indigenous parents' child-care needs, they commenced collaborative problem solving with their local child-care provider. Confidence in researching their own community has led the Coen Local Alliance to start implementing their own research into the current state of housing and home ownership in their community.

“**If we want to see positive change in our community, we have to be willing to put the time and effort in to make it happen.”**

Coen 2017

CASE STUDY 3
Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Inc. Mossman Gorge: Skills for Change

The Mossman Gorge Local Alliance identified their priorities around which they are currently building their long term Local Development Agenda; Income and Employment; Health; Education; Language and Culture; and Safety and Leadership. There has been a great deal of capability and capacity development from the EC backbone. However, it is the Mossman Gorge Local Champion, who has been able to lead and facilitate much of the process with her own people around creating the Local Development Agenda for language, and undertaking documentation of the process steps. The Local Champion and other Mossman Gorge leaders are increasingly confident in representing the views and decisions of the Mossman Gorge community through their Local Development Agenda.

“**We’ve still got a long way to go, but I’m really encouraged.”**

Mossman Gorge 2017

CASE STUDY 4
Alliance of the Guugu Yimithirr Families Hope Vale: Working Differently

When members of Hope Vale were first thinking about EC and how it could work in their community, they had to consider how the community could work better together. Hope Vale already had many organisations in the community. The people in Hope Vale decided to create an alliance of family representatives of Hope Vale. Keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, the Local Alliance ensures every Hope Vale family has the opportunity to contribute to the Local Development Agenda for their community over for the next 10 years.

Once they had a clear understanding of the gap in existing child-care services in Hope Vale and young working Indigenous parents' child-care needs, they commenced collaborative problem solving with their local child-care provider. Confidence in researching their own community has led the Coen Local Alliance to start implementing their own research into the current state of housing and home ownership in their community.

Disclaimer: Empowered Communities is a long term process of change. The information contained in these reports is a snapshot in time based on data collected in the first 12 months of implementation. As EC evolves and more Indigenous people and communities become involved, so will the story of change in each Region. To become involved, please contact the Backbone organisation in your Region.