

# Nt government fin

Government



It is prudent at this juncture to define the northern territory as a way of introduction. The northern territory (NT) is much of a political territory, which shares geographical location with north Australia. This is the main distinctive feature. However there are several differences In terms of the social and cultural orientation within the geographical region of north Australia.

The northern territory exists as a self-government territory. However the territory derives its right to govern from the federal parliament. This means that the supreme authority is still the federal parliament. It follows that the decision reached at the northern territory legislative assembly is subject to the approval of the federal parliament. This happens to be what separates the self-governing territory of the Northern Territory from the rest of Australia. The political structure in the larger Australia is such that the states are sovereign and only come together under the federal government.

The northern territory self-government act of 1978 gave a new status to the northern territory. In this act the northern territory was granted authority that could help it become a self-autonomous entity, usurping a few roles from the commonwealth. A few of responsibilities and duties initially carried out by the common wealth were transferred to the northern territory. A superficial glance at the territory and comparison with the other states indicates almost a complete similarity. However, the territory sits a shoulder below the rest in terms of authority and the structure of the government. It leans more towards being a self-autonomous territory as opposed to the usual states in the common wealth.

Although all the states in the common wealth are independent and value sovereignty, the 1978 act to self-given presents the biggest difference

between these and the northern territory. The government in northern territory can make and enforce its own laws, but should the federal government wish to overturn or override it, it can achieve this through the parliament. An example in point is the euthanasia legislation passed by northern territory but overridden by the national parliament ( ).

In the place of a governor, the northern territory has administrator who wields executives' power. He leads with the help of an executive council. The territory too has its representative in the federal legislature comprising of two representatives and two people in the senate.

The territory has a legislative assembly consisting of members that are elected to speaker and the member of the executive council or the ministers. The northern territory also has local governments and authorities with some full administrative powers in Darwin, the capital city as well as in other large towns, these administrative centers provide essential services to the people ranging from housing to health among others.

Northern territories have a fully-fledged legal system with the Supreme Court as the highest court in the land.

There is a chief minister who leads the self-autonomous government while the premier leads the state government. These two are appointed by the administrator who in turn is appointed by the governor-general of Australia.

In the national scene, the parliament is made up of the senate and the house of representative it deals with matters affecting almost all the states like foreign affair or the issue of protecting the nation as is the case in the United

States. The territory's representation in these two organs is a bit lower to make up for special status that it enjoys with an autonomous government.

### Broadresponsibility

The northern territory government is charged with the responsibility of managing the affairs of the territory save for those that are national in nature like the world heritage areas and national parks located within the territory (Strelein L (2000)). This is done to avoid conflicts between the two levels of government. Areas that fall within the northern territory government share of responsibility include but not limited to; education, health, and issues, administrative matters, infrastructure and local government. In order to perform these duties the NT government receives funds from the federal government.

### Relationship with federal government

It is clear that the two levels of government are mutually dependent. The federal government looks up to the territorial government to facilitate the implementation of laws and policies. Additionally the federal government expects to receive money remitted by the territorial government in order to reach its own objectives. On the other hand, the territorial government receives funds from the federal government to meet its budgetary obligations. This has for long time been a subject of much debate and controversy not only in the northern territory but also elsewhere in Australia and also in the world.

The federal government in Australia has to perform a balancing act in order to achieve some kind of equity. Equitable distribution of resources is a thorny

issue here. This balance is important for stability of any nation. An example of inequality is between the State of California in the US and the Mississippi between which a huge economic disparity exists. There has existed a general discontent especially from richer states in the way the national government distributes money contributed by these states.

One of the important areas of development that lie within the responsibility of the NT government is cultural development. Culture is a very important composite of any society. However, in the modern world, rarely would any society share in all aspects of a common culture. According to Martin C (1995), this is mainly because of the historical backgrounds that are as varied as the trends of the modern lifestyle. It is therefore important to understand the basics of cultural dynamics before any form of cultural development can be contemplated.

Cultural development can be defined as the process through which the full potential of cultural diversity can be achieved for the common good. Culture is a most valuable symbol of identity and should not be lost either through assimilation or neglect. Cultural diversity brings out the uniqueness of the northern territory community (CUC107 Northern Perspectives. Cultural expansion and change (2007). One of the unique characteristics of the responsibility that the territorial government has in conserving and developing cultural diversity springs from the history of the people of the Northern Territory.

The earliest inhabitants of the northern territory were the indigenous people. These people had and still have a rich culture and customs by which they lived. However, when the European immigrants settled in Australia, they

sought to undermine this culture terming it as backwards. They also sought to force their own ways, which they viewed as superior. For many years this opinion has dictated the nature of interaction between the indigenous people and the settlers. It has also influenced public opinion as well as dominant ideologies (Eckerman T. et al 1992).

Upon this background, the territorial government must work to alter this perception and opinion that is based against the culture and custom of the aboriginal people as well as the Torres-strait islander people. The long enduring opinion is narrow and ill informed. It is full assumptions and biases that view some cultures and practices as more superior than others. Cultural development begins with the understanding of the uniqueness of the self. It is the responsibility of the Northern Territory government to promote understanding, acceptance interest and most of all harmonious existence among people of different cultural affiliations. The goal should be for the entire population to appreciate other cultures and to nurture rather than to kill diversity. The goal should also be to create a strong sense of belonging through culture where the population is proud of being who they are.

Killing cultural diversity is tantamount to killing own individual identity. The study of culture has somehow increased awareness among those who take time to give thought to the wisdom those studies. However the world is still at a point where the western definition of what is superior and what is mediocre is widely embraced. Against this background many cultures have lost invaluable parts that were part of the whole thus becoming diluted (Hunter, E. (1993). This presents the main challenge to the Northern Territory government in its management and development of culture.

The Northern Territory government must work from a seemingly “ point of weakness” because many of the cultural practice and customs have lost so much already which cannot be recovered. Elements of culture such as language have also changed greatly. The way people talked as well as the content of these talks has changed overtime. Among the indigenous people for instance, folk tales were used to impart knowledge as well as to pass traditions from one generation to next. However folk tales have today found replacement in technology and the consequences are a lost method of passing culture to generations (CUC107 Northern Perspectives. Cultural expansion and change (2007).

These are among the challenges that the Northern Territory government faces. Capitalistic ideologies and economic power has placed some countries at a position where they can dictate the direction the rest of the world takes. This includes dominating cultures. The disadvantaged, minorities and marginalized population have little choice but to tow the line appropriately (Alder, C. 1999). Economic development in the Northern Territory, which ironically must be encouraged, can only serve to diminish any gains on the cultural diversity front. This is a challenge to the Northern Territory government cultural development plans. It is easy to see here that the sacrifices that must be made are economic prosperity or the conservation of culture. With the world being the way it is today the Northern Territory government is hard pressed to make a decision to promote economic prosperity at the expense of culture.

The Northern Territory government can however produce a win-win situation, by embracing innovative thinking to ensure sustainable development both economically and culturally.

It is unfortunate that despite the fact that an opportunity clearly exists in the northern territory to develop ways of achieving sustainable cultural development, not much good seems to be coming out of the processes. This can be attributed to the fact that the focus of the main stakeholders is wrong. The Northern Territory government has loudly cited scarcity of funds as the main obstacle in achievement of sustainable cultural development. This has denied these stakeholders from seeing the other methods and avenues open to them to exploit the opportunity (Ames, R et al 1989). The Northern Territory government has tried to develop a framework upon which to build its plans. One has been the involvement of women and the aboriginal people in decision-making process. Their representation has however not always been adequate which has worked against this plan.

The NT government has also sought to promote culture by supporting cultural activities like road shows and festivals especially in Darwin. These attractions have served to showcase some of the diverse cultures that exist in Northern Territory. The events are increasingly becoming popular though at a very slow pace.

The budget for cultural development has also been increasing steadily over the past few years (Christie, M. 2000).

While the efforts of the NT government to involve the local communities especially the aboriginal and Torres-strait islander people together with



women and other minority groups are laudable. This paper suggests that more can be done in order to speed up the process and consolidate gains achieved so far. Wide consultations have a way of fostering ownership. It is therefore important that the NT government seek to improve participation of the local communities in decision-making. Representation should be increased in the decision-making organ. Additionally, in order to increase coercion the NT government should develop a holistic approach that includes educating the people at all levels of the society to appreciate their cultures as well as other cultures within this society. This can be done formally in small community groups as well as through other contemporary media.

Another laudable gesture that should be developed further is use of cultural events and festivals. Cultural events have succeeded elsewhere as tourist attraction and consequently served to preserve the practice. In Spain bullfighting is a cultural even that is unique to this part of the world. It has gained a cult like following and has also been used as a tourist attraction. In Brazil, street carnival where people showcase there cultural dances such as samba have also become an eye catching event that is widely accepted all over the world. Similarly events could be organized regularly to showcase the NT diverse cultures.

The Northern Territory should also explore the use of cultural ambassadors in other parts of Australia and the world in order to advertise the culture and to promote cultural tourism.

Conclusion

While plans are underway to confer full powers of statehood in the Northern Territory, the territorial government must increase ensure sustainable development in all areas of development. It is the responsibility of the Northern Territory government to promote understanding, acceptance interest and most of all harmonious existence among people of different cultural affiliations. The goal should be for the entire population to appreciate other cultures and to nurture rather than to kill diversity. Cultural diversity must never be sacrificed in the altar of economic development.

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