

Title:

'Poor (Indigenous) Economics: Lessons for Indigenous policy from development and lessons for development policy from Indigenous research'

Abstract:

Across most indicators of socioeconomic status, health and wellbeing, Indigenous Australians experience one of the highest levels of disadvantage amongst all population subgroups in Australia. For this reason and because of the important historical place that Indigenous Australians have in Australia's history, there are six specific targets that have been endorsed by all levels of government in Australia relating to 'Closing the Gap' - two related to health, three to education and one to employment. Despite this focus, surprisingly little is known in a quantitative sense about what specific policies work to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians either in remote or non-remote Australia. While there are well documented limitations, it is fair to say that the increasing reliance on randomised controlled trials and other quantitative evaluations within development economics has improved our understanding of how and why specific policies work in practice. The aim of this paper is to document some of the lessons for Indigenous policy in Australia that can be derived from a few of these social and policy experiments. This will be done through case studies on education, employment and disability and supported by recent quantitative work carried out by the author on Indigenous Australians. Not only can Indigenous policy benefit from development research, but it is also important to keep in mind that there are estimated to be between 250 and 300 million Indigenous peoples living in countries outside the traditionally researched areas of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US. The final part of the paper will therefore focus on a few key insights for the design and implementation of development policy in the Asia-Pacific region that arise from Indigenous-specific research in developed countries.

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