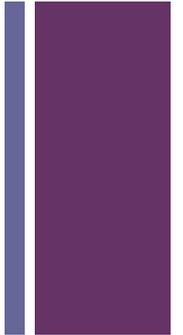


Not a level playing field: approaches to remote workforce development in the Northern Territory

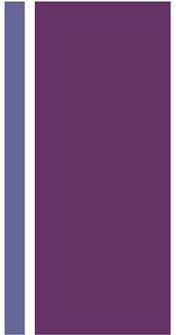
Emma Williams & Eileen Cummings, Charles Darwin University
Presented as a Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research seminar,
Canberra, 23 March 2011

+ Context of research



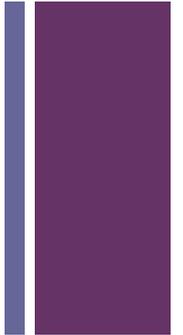
- Little Children are Sacred report, Australian Government Intervention
- Governance changes – local councils to Shires
- Closing the Gap, Growth towns policy
- Staff churn (eg in single program in period of months 3 Program Managers, 2 Directors, 4 Executive Directors, 3 CEOs) and recent restructure
- Move within commissioning agency (NTFC) to stronger focus on family support and strengthening for prevention of child abuse, and also improving clients' cultural safety and Aboriginal employment

+ Cultural context



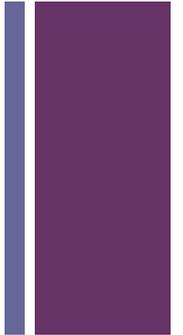
- NT has 1% of Australia's population, spread over one sixth of continent's surface
- 30% NT population Indigenous, greatest concentration of 'traditional' lifestyles in Australia, e.g. avoidance relationships, cultural authority, diversity of languages (English as 3rd, 4th, 5th language)
- Diverse history, urban access, governance, land stability
- Research focused on Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Alice Springs, and four remote communities, each home to different cultural group: Anmatjere, Warlpiri, Tiwi, Yolngu

+ Questions (initial)



- Who should employ? Govt vs NGO vs IMS,
- Full-time vs part-time?
- Recruitment strategies? (eg role of community)
- Training strategies? (esp prior learning and link to national qualifications)
- Support and supervision strategies and allocations?
- Problem identification and resolution strategies?
- Long term retention, development/promotion strategies?

+ Limitations



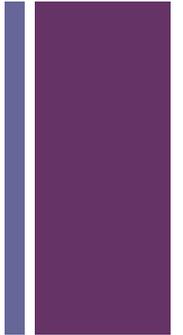
- Resource limitations - Miniscule budget (several thousand \$\$ plus in kind support)
- Data limitations – no NTG statistics categorised by ‘remote staff’, contract renewals classed as new contracts in PIPS system
- Previous research limitations – relatively little done in this area, eg history of white collar Aboriginal employment in NT, remote Aboriginal personnel issues (Ganter thesis ground-breaking)
- Conceptual limitations - No definition of ‘remote worker’, and sometimes hard for interviewees to grasp concept; historical focus on external recruitment into remote areas

+ Defining the issue



- Remote workforce = local Aboriginal remote community members working locally
- In this research, focused on those working in community safety and family support areas, including child protection.
- Cultural remoteness a key issue – NOT to be confused with degrees of Indigeneity
- Factors include: observation of avoidance relationships; home/preferred language(s); role in ceremonies; above all, identified by local community members
- This type of information not captured in personnel files

+ Methodology



- (Very brief) literature review and sought to review statistics re remote hiring, turnover, promotion, etc
- Able to use multiple methods evaluation of new child protection remote worker program (RAFCP)
- ‘Fire tool’ consultations in remote communities on factors that best enable strong families and community safety
- Dozens of semi-structured interviews, especially with people with multiple workplace experiences, but also with policy makers and senior decision makers - input from remote workers as well as government staff, NGO workers, IMS leaders and staff
- Workshopped emerging findings with small groups of remote workers and senior government staff

+ The 'fire tool'

- Way for community members to discuss community safety and family well-being issues, identify protective factors, pressures and response effectiveness



+ 'Fire tool' in action

- Administered in groups, usually with food; auspicing critical; after identifying important local influences for and against community safety and family well-being, quantified current situation



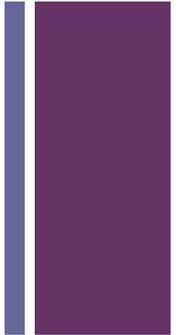


Fire tool results – community consensus



- When asked ‘what factors keep this community safe and families strong?’, EVERY community group primarily noted traditional mechanisms such as ceremonies, intergenerational transmission of culture, ‘old style’ hunting and gathering activities
- When asked, ‘what are the things that are pushing this community away from the fire?’, EVERY community group noted alcohol and other substance abuse, jealousy and violence.
- When asked to rate externally funded programs and services ‘bringing us back to the fire?’, often quite low scores resulted

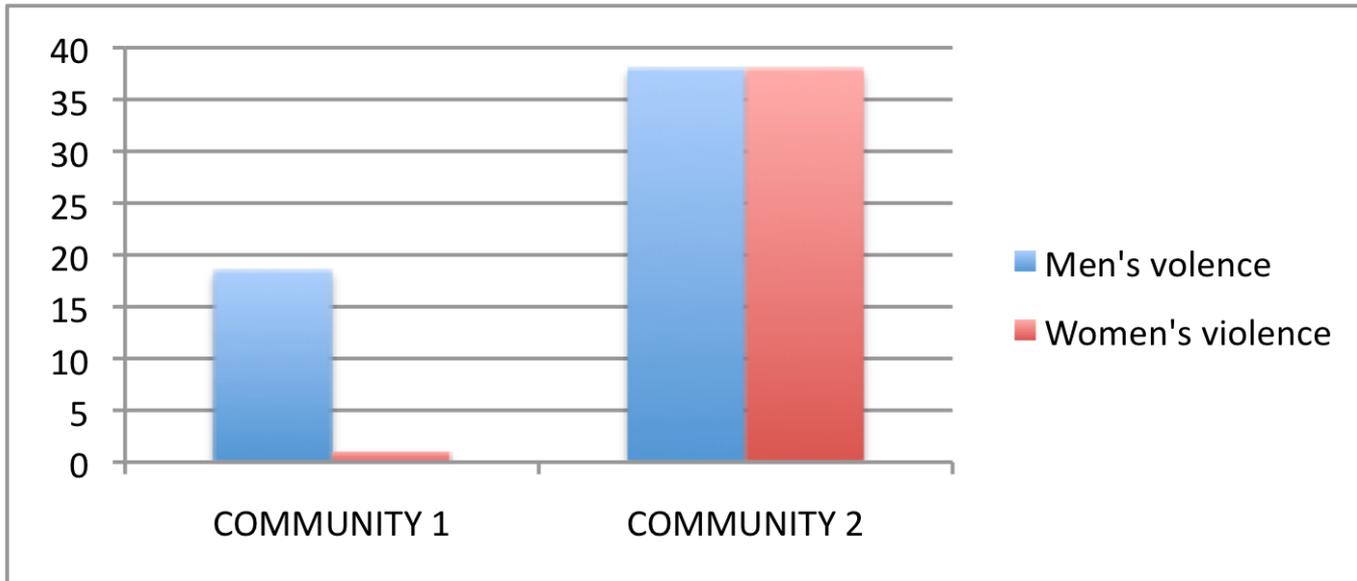
+ Community differences



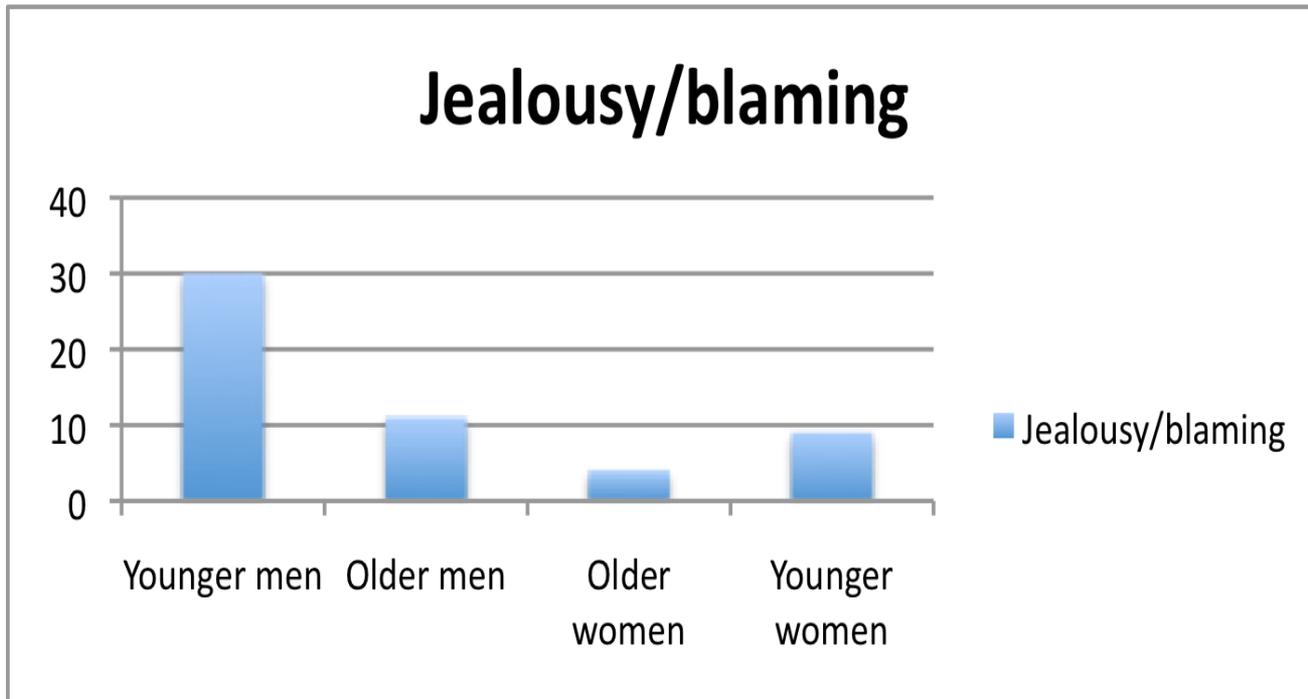
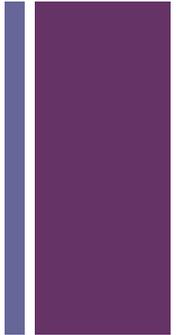
- In some communities, men and women rated as almost equal for problems with alcohol, violence – in others, strong gender differences
- Some communities noted how age made a difference, with young men and women contrasted with older men and women
- Special factors in some communities, eg negative impact of easy access to Alice Springs for one community, or specific local protective mechanisms such as skin group meetings, different perceived impact of ‘wrong way’ relationships



Inter-community differences



+ Intra-community differences





Interview findings - general



Barriers

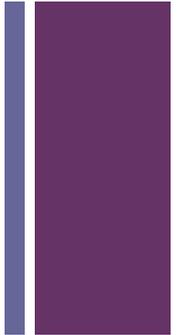
- Formal education, qualifications and experience levels
- Community churn, over-burdening and cherry picking
- Safety, confidentiality and conflict of interest

Rewards

- Use the knowledge and skills available in remote areas, increase local employment, and improved local access to services but also...
- Potential for transforming system, cultural grounding

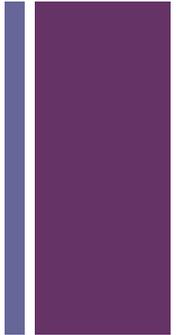


Findings - government workplaces



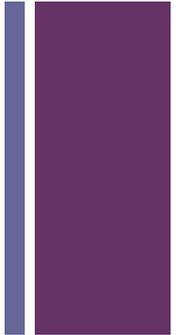
- Many remote workers wanted to be government employees (perhaps esp NTG as 'our own government')
- No recognition of remote in PIPS or strategy, remote workers conflated with 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' staff
- 'Level playing field' – e-recruitment, NT AO2 and AO3 (entry or lower level positions) very rigidly classified as transferable administration pool
- Role issues – Aboriginal staff do job or be job? Differed by level of government and also by agency

+ Findings – NGO workplaces



- Non Government Organisation as employer – offers more potential flexibility but...
- No tracking, formal prioritisation of Indigenous employment
- Under-developed sector in NT
- Most agencies have little footprint in remote
- ‘Level playing field’ tender vs history-based funding

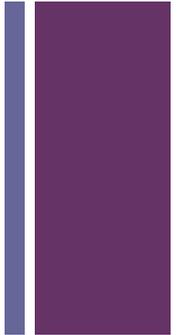
+ Findings – IMS workplaces



- Indigenous Managed Service – potentially offers more cultural safety, but...
- ‘Level playing field’ tenders and competition from bigger players
- Equally important – ‘mainstreamise’ through contract structure and accountability arrangements

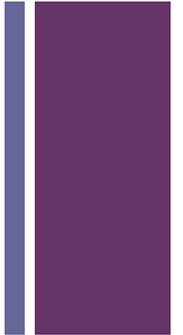
+ Findings – independent contractors

- Can be viable and found examples where worked well, but...
- Remote contractors too often abused with low daily rates, lack of understanding or appreciation for skills and knowledge
- Potentially brokerage service could assist; hub model could potentially fit within growth town model





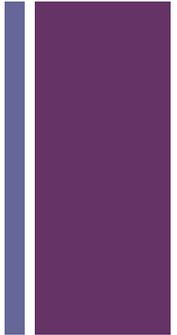
Promising practice findings



- Asked participants about successful remote employment programs
- Specially interested in programs that succeeded after earlier struggles, or where improvements underway
- Five looked at in more detail

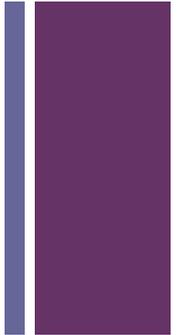


1 - Centrelink



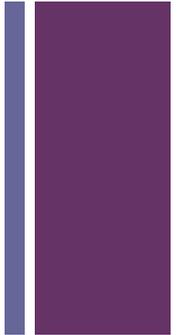
- Australian Government employer
- Remote workers trained to take over office operations in several remote communities
- After rough start, studied how to do better (2007 capability framework) and made employment systems more responsive to remote context
- PPs include managers with appropriate skill sets, family induction, long 'probation' period, term-long student placements
- Currently, no intention to extend program; different direction being taken currently

+ 2 Raypirri Rom



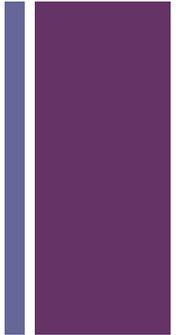
- IMS – Miwatj Health
- Uses Yolngu traditional authority to address community problems such violence and substance abuse in Yirrkala, Gunyangara, Galuru
- PPs - Training time for ceremonies, fishbone reflective practice, oversight of elders
- Funding threatened but now resumed

+ 3 ACPO



- Aboriginal Community Police Officer, NT Police
- Run away from rather than towards danger
- PP - Now always partnered; do cultural education of new officers; Indigenous Policing Development Division provides pastoral care and welfare support
- Currently, moving away from ACPO model and towards Aboriginal Police Officer model, where trained and supported to take on all aspects of the police job

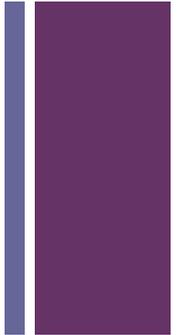
+ 4 CPPO



- Community Probation and Parole Officers, NT Community Corrections
- Quite a new program
- PP - recruitment (to avoid Latvians!); training emphasis, linked to national competencies but with remote focus; daily contact with PPO, SPPO and weekly with CPPO mgt
- One issue: really effective CPPOs can work themselves out of a job!
- Currently - TBA

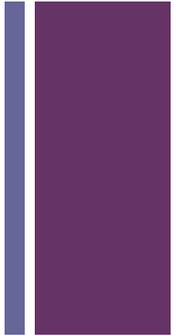


5 RAFCP

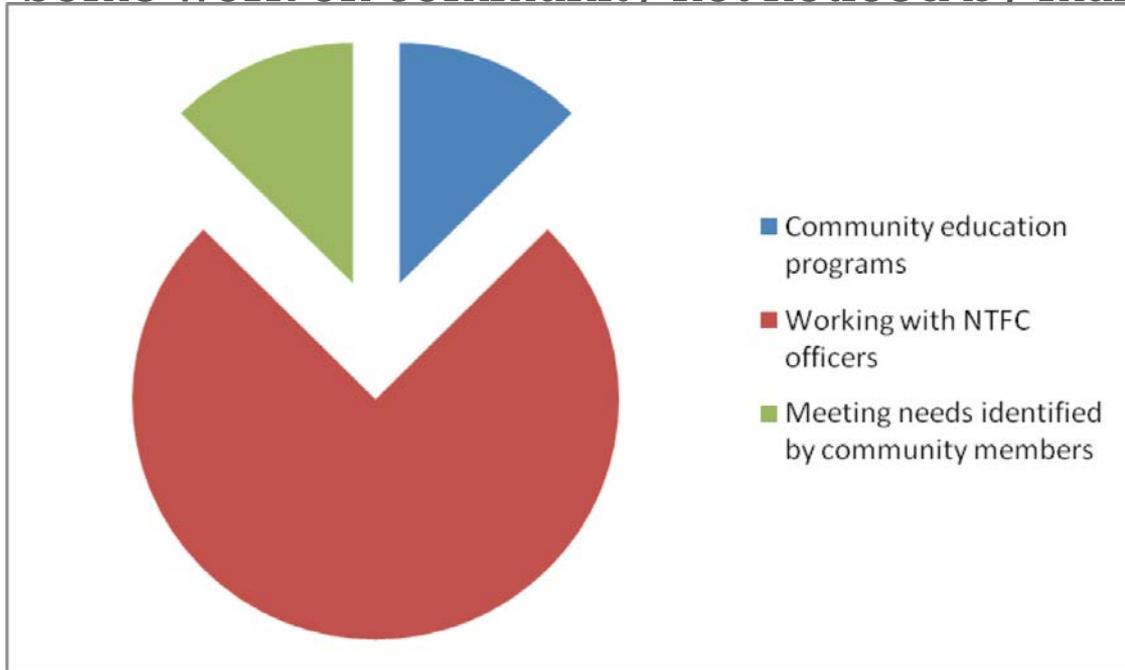


- Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Program, NT Families and Children (child protection); NTER product
- Evolving role – 5 streams: complementing forensic investigation side of CP; community education; community-initiated requests; transforming the system; enabling
- PP – 1:3 (FTE) ratio for supervising/monitoring/mentoring; supervisor skills; community responsiveness; originally community selection, but now ‘growth towns’ mandate
- Program displays the sometimes fuzzy boundary between paid work and ‘cultural citizenship’

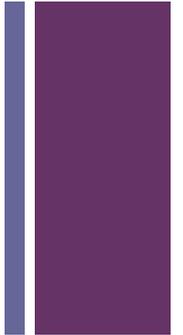
+ Manager view



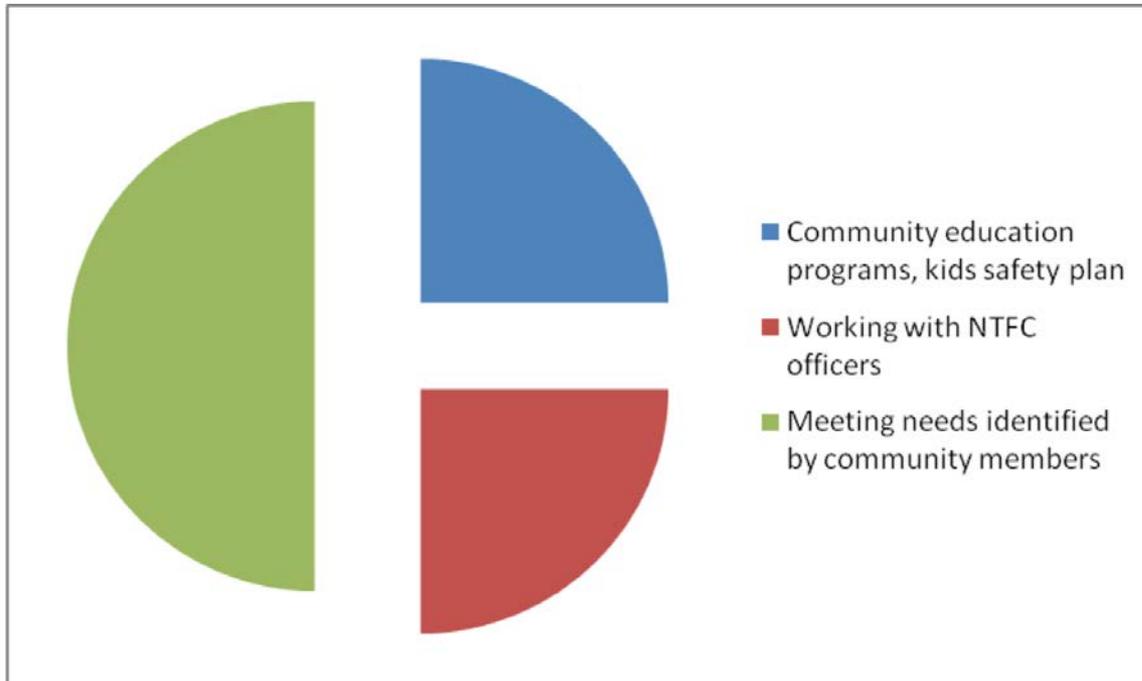
- Some work on community not noticed by manager



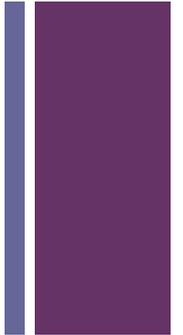
+ Staff person's view



- Even workers might not write up all the work they do

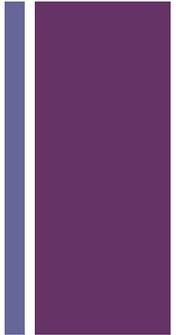


+ The pie paradox



- What counts as 'work'?
- First finding: manager underestimated the amount of community work the RAFCW was doing
- Second finding: *worker* underestimated the amount of community work they were doing
- Impact of cultural citizenship not sufficiently understood – neither its contribution nor its potential conflict
- Different impact depending on job role

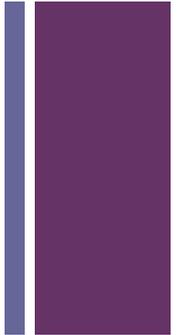
+ Remote Jobs Typology



- **Replacement** jobs – remote workers take on jobs that would otherwise be done by those recruited externally, and are responsible for full range of job tasks
- **Complementary** jobs – remote worker takes on elements of mainstream job role perceived to be safer/more culturally congruent/requiring fewer formal qualifications and works with person externally recruited/based who handles other elements of the job
- **Culturally based** jobs – instead of being based on mainstream work, elements of traditional roles are packaged as a salaried position
- In practice, a continuum



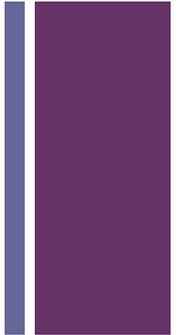
In conclusion...



- Research produced, if not definitive answers, at least examples of promising practice and guidelines in the areas covered by the initial questions, eg recruitment, training, supervision and support, determining an employer, etc
- BUT research also revealed some of the barriers to changing practice in this area (eg importance of 2 way learning and accountability)
- and also...
- Revealed new questions and answers (especially questions) unsuspected when research was initiated



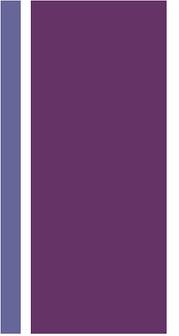
Future areas for exploration

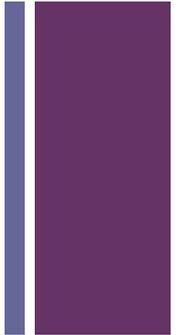


- Remote job typology
- Cultural citizenship and salaried work boundaries
- ‘Wave theory’ – appears that where traditional and mainstream approaches are congruent, each reinforces the other, but.... (eg patrol refused vehicle to search for missing person)
- Mainstreaming vs Indigenisation
- Potential for culturally based jobs and/or value clash - more work done on health practice than social work, etc; much work in this area remains to be done

+ THE END

- And over to other researchers...





- Published in 2005, *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 14(2), 230-237 *Dilemmas of international social work: Paradoxical processes in indigenisation, universalism and imperialism* Mel Gray Professor of Social Work, University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia
- This paper explores current paradoxical processes in international social work concerning the global diffusion of the social work profession's principles, values and practice methods or approaches. Some criticise these activities on the grounds that they are imperialistic. Others advocate strongly for the indigenisation of social work. Yet others believe in social work's universality. This paper attempts to stimulate debate on, and promote greater understanding of, and mutual respect for, divergent views on these critical questions. It puts forward the notion that culture is an important consideration that enables indigenisation, retains universals yet avoids imperialism.