Community-driven Research in the Torres Strait

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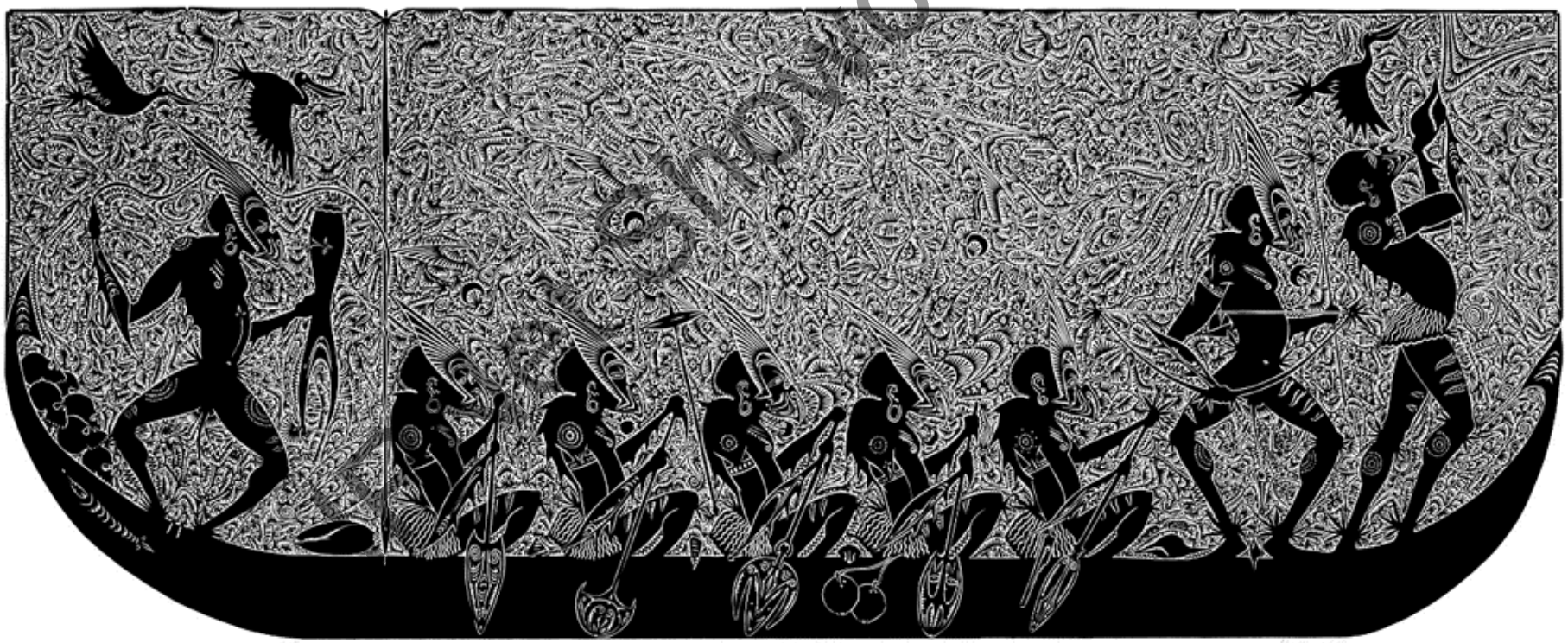
Case 2020



How this initiative came about…

- **Hot North** Research Conference July 2018. “It’s time……for locally-owned research.”
- **AITHM** building, November 2018 → workshop **“Approaching a Community-Driven Research Agenda”** → unexpected turnout, ‘vigorous’ [torrid] discussion, some angry people
- AITHM-JCU → planned a research-strengthening initiative [Prof Sarah Larkins] based on the WHO SORT-IT model→ ‘popular as a fart in a lift’

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Review of local perception of research

Why is this so?

What can be done? → ownership

"We have been researched to death; maybe it's time we started researching our way back to life"

Community Elder

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This set off a new process…

- **Consultation:** Torres Strait Consultative Group [community elders and senior TS health providers] → develop a Torres Strait curriculum based on local culture and health needs → **Romina Fujii**
- Limit didactic teaching and go for a learn-by-doing approach
- The Torres Strait Consultative Group to 'call the shots' and co-ordinate feedback
- Calls for EOI [expecting 7-8 replies] → 24 replies from across the health system → all accepted
- Series of workshops planned
- Catalyst for a paradigm shift – powershift - to inform the body of literature from a local community and cultural setting ….(Nakata 2019)

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Identifying and addressing the right questions

- Workers on the frontline frequently come across obstacles in the system; they know what the system doesn't know
- They also have ideas about potential solutions, ideas outside 'the system'
- Community-driven research can find solutions
- There may be more than one solution

Searching for 'positive health outcomes'
Not just looking for problems;
looking for solutions

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The curriculum

Workshop 1: Why we do research. Asking the right questions. Making a one-pager → **feedback**

Workshop 2: Ways to address the questions in a cultural context. Qualitative and quantitative research. Creating a research proposal. Ethics → **feedback**

Workshop 3: What to measure and how to measure it. Collecting and handling information; how to put the information together → **feedback**

Workshop 4: What to do with the results. Presentations, reports, publications. Implementation. Planning the next step.

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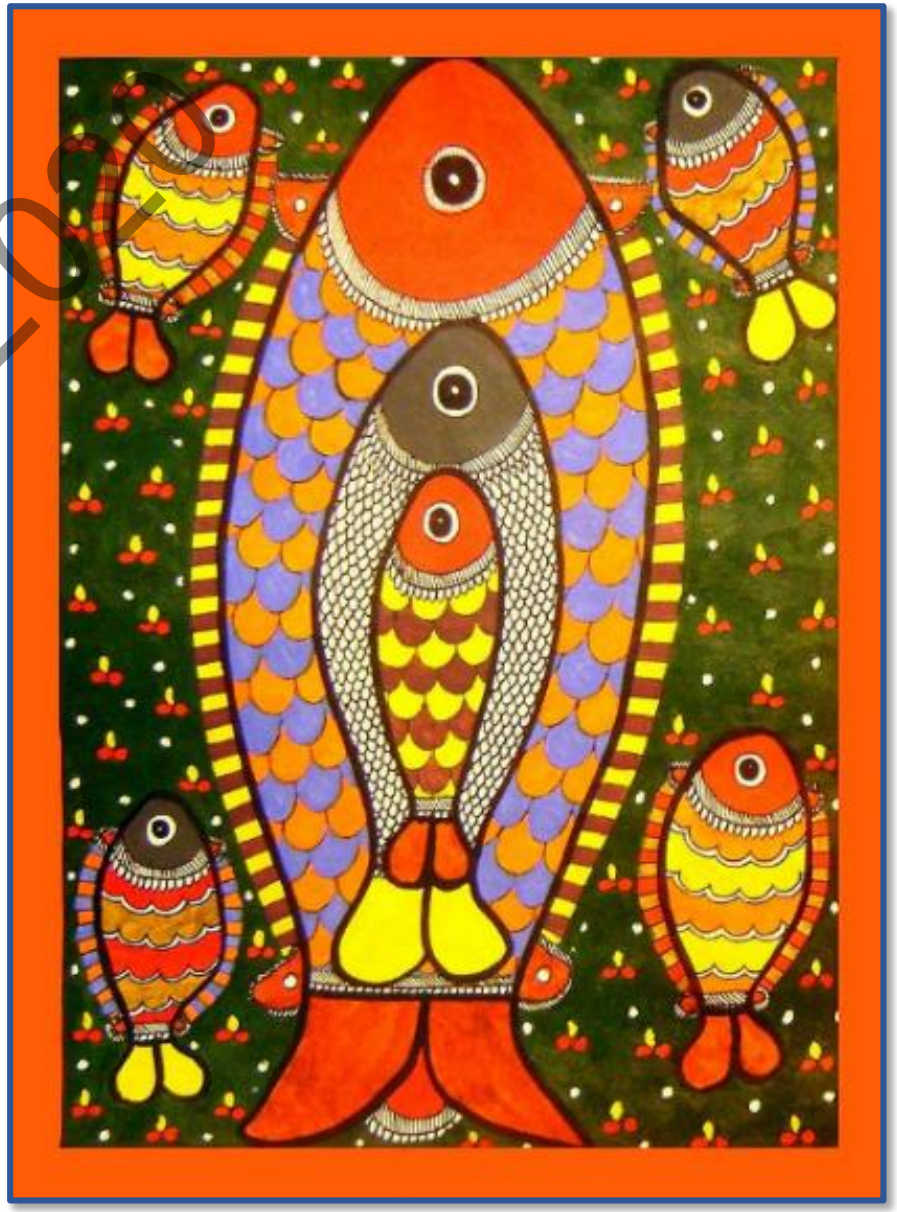
The workshop process

- Small multi-disciplinary groups
- Working together: using the tools at hand
- Addressing questions that locally matter
- Ensuring everyone has a say
- Small groups reporting back to the larger group
- Free discussion: people can speak up at any time
- **Feedback** → integrated into the process
- Flexibility: we can change course or emphasis as required and at any point



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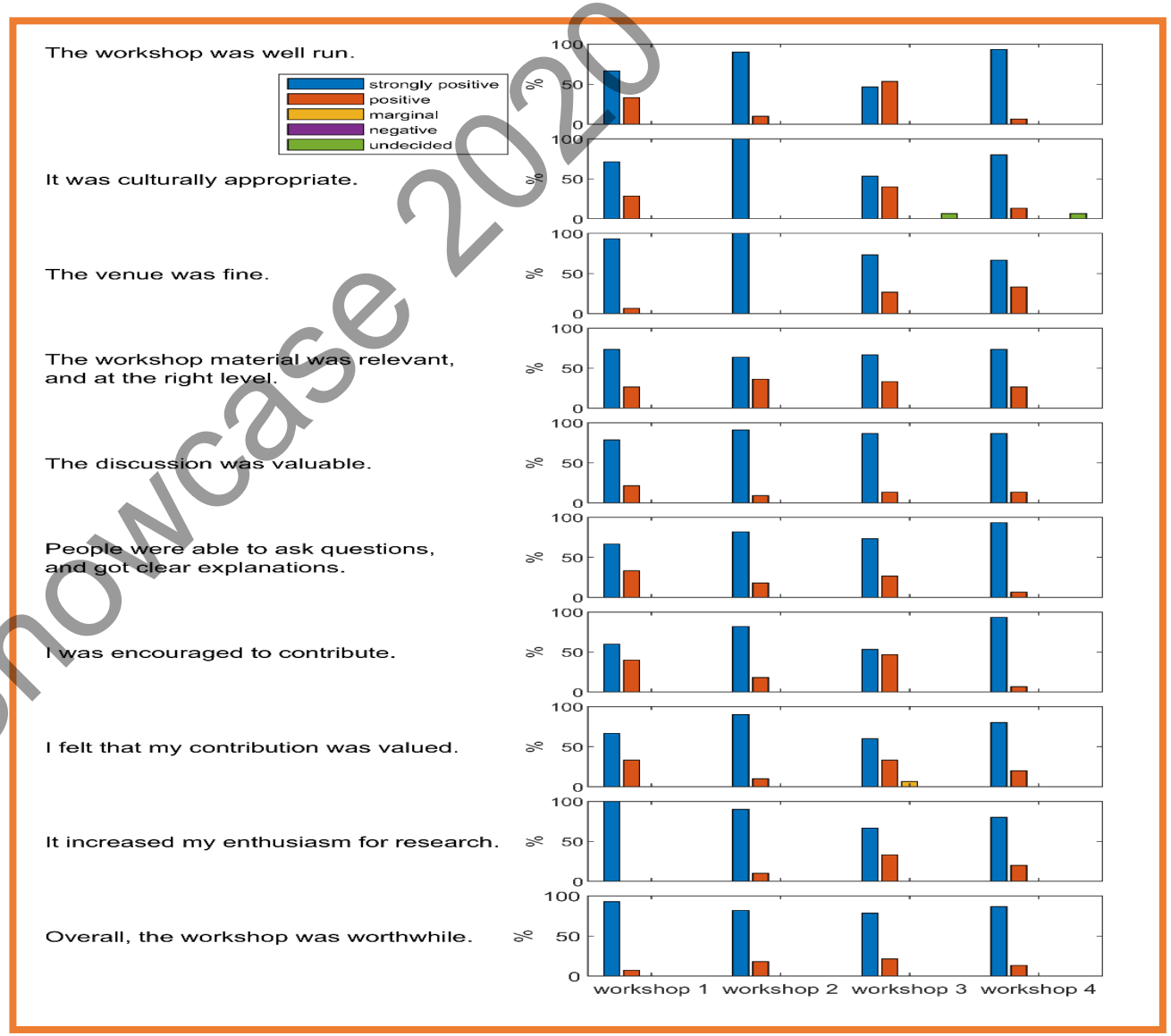
Researchers at work

AITHM

Overall, feedback was strongly positive



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Community-driven research 2020

- Funding from AITHM-JCU, Hot North
- Romina Fujii Scholarship
- Grant proposal for part-time coordinator
- Three workshops planned: writing, talking and research proposal development
- Mentor program
- Long-term agenda

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Strengthening research capacity

- This is critical: ideally through hands-on ‘learning by doing’
- Getting started: small projects, look for the ‘low-hanging fruit’ Success begets success
- Initially may need outside help: collaboration is a key part of research
- Find ways for community to value and nurture community-based researchers: otherwise they will leave and get snapped-up elsewhere

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Translating the findings into health benefits
This is the hardest bit

- Approach community leaders and organisations
- Get the attention of the bean counters
- Recognize that people resist change: this needs persistence and patience
- Show that an innovation works: with perhaps a new research project
- Establish a pattern of research translation: the more you do it, the better you get

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The long-term approach

- Research never ends; there is always the next step
- Think about a long-term agenda
- Communities can become centres of expertise
- A successful research agenda attracts funding, resources and respect…….**and greatly benefits the people!**

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Would you adopt the Community-driven Research model in your community?

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