

COMMUNITY

Case study



Plants for People – community project at Sunrise Dam

Initiated in 2005, the Plants for People (P4P) Wongatha Wonganara Partnership Project, sponsored by AngloGold Ashanti Australia, is a collaborative effort between Curtin University and Wongatha Wonganara Aboriginal Corporation (WWAC). This latest project aimed at empowering the local community, is another initiative flowing from AngloGold Ashanti's contribution to the Wongatha Wonganara Aboriginal Corporation (WWAC). (See case study in *Report to Society 2005: Making a difference – Wongatha Wonganara Aboriginal Corporation.*)

This new community project signals for AngloGold Ashanti Australia a significant shift in approach – notably by creating the right environment at community level where new initiatives are generated by the community, whereas previously the impetus would emerge first at company level. The P4P project is designed to empower the local Aboriginal community of Laverton (situated some 50km from the Sunrise Dam gold mine) to revitalise traditional knowledge, in particular with regard to plants and their uses, and to apply this knowledge in health, education and enterprise development initiatives.

With a strong focus on engagement with the local Aboriginal community, the project aims to document the historical uses of land, plants and animals in the local area of Sunrise Dam's operations and to investigate the application of this information into current mine closure planning activities. Opportunities for supporting local community initiatives are also being explored, particularly in the area of general health, education and in generating economic enterprise and employment opportunities. The community has already indicated interest to explore opportunities to produce cosmetic lotions and creams using traditional ingredients commonly referred to in Australia as "bush medicine". The cottage industry for indigenous sourced cosmetic products in Australia, and indeed globally, is growing rapidly.

The project started with a series of meetings and discussions between project team members from Curtin University and members of the Wongatha Wonganara community. These discussions focused on project activities that might be incorporated into a three year programme. The initial thrust of the project was to conduct a plant audit aimed at identifying plant species of value to the local Aboriginal community with the view of including these plant species in Sunrise Dam's site rehabilitation program. The view was taken that strategic planting of selected local species in rehabilitation areas could provide a useful post-mining resource for local people that could feed into "bush medicine" enterprises.

Another spin-off has led to project staff engaging with the local school to involve children in related project fieldwork to highlight the value and significance of Aboriginal traditional knowledge. Plant distillation demonstrations and field trips led by Aboriginal elders are taking place, with additional activities planned for 2007. These activities help to bring together children from all backgrounds within the local community, with the aim of reinforcing the notion that both Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems hold equal weight and validity in modern society.

The project also provides an alternative focus for students by combining their normal curriculum with real life activities, which may then translate into future growth enterprises, thereby providing visible evidence of matching learning skills with real-life practical outcomes. An added benefit is that elders in the community are redeployed in the teaching environment, providing for them a platform to pass on traditional Aboriginal knowledge, an opportunity not otherwise available in mainstream education. The local school welcomes this addition to their school programme as it enhances the "stay at school" initiatives, which is a key objective for remote area education where high school student drop out rates are very high.

