

Statement toward respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Country



DSAA
Development Studies Association of Australia

This statement is a commitment to truth-telling, reconciliation and respectful relationships

Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are the First Peoples of what is now known as Australia. We commit to listening *deeply* to those who hold knowledge and memory of this place, including recent memory of ill treatment



Country

Country encompasses lands, seas, air and all our more-than-human kin. We commit to strengthening relationships and care of Country, especially the Country where we live and work

Truth telling

Today in Australia, colonisation is unfinished business. We all work, live and depend on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander¹ lands, also understood as Country or Mother. Colonial practices in Australia included the removal and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral homelands, from Country. This loss of land has caused, and continues to cause, grief in many communities, contributing to intergenerational trauma.

Research has been used – and often still is – to justify colonial practices and portray Euro-Western researchers as experts on Indigenous Peoples – limiting the self-determination and active participation of Indigenous Peoples in development processes. Education systems have often silenced Indigenous Peoples' experience of our shared colonial history and dismissed long-standing cultural knowledges and perspectives.

These practices have fuelled a development sector, and a field of development studies research, that often profits from the structural disadvantage of Indigenous Peoples. This statement is significant in helping move the Development Studies community of Australia toward more relational and respectful practices.

Our commitment

We recognise that we cannot undo what has been done, but we commit to changing the way we teach, research and practice development into the future. We will promote truth-telling about our shared histories, facilitate greater sharing and understanding of Indigenous knowledges, and ensure equal and equitable partnerships in research and practice that impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – 'nothing about us without us'

We will hold strong to the self-determining aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and keep pressure on governments and organisations to uphold local and national frameworks developed by Indigenous communities, alongside international human rights commitments.

We commit to respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Country.

¹ The terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' are often used interchangeably

Strengthening relationships

In Australia, we all live on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander lands. We seek to understand what it means to live on Country and how we can build trusting and honest relationships with local custodians who have cared for Country for thousands of generations. We commit to being humble in our relationships with Indigenous Peoples, Country and knowledges. We understand slow relationships are a starting point to strengthen trust and understanding between Peoples, Country, our shared histories and the role of Indigenous Peoples in directing development in Australia.

Teaching

We commit to fostering critical thinking among our students with the aim of generating greater engagement and respectful dialogue between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians and non-Australians. We seek to provide culturally safe learning environments that include local Indigenous Peoples and knowledges to decolonise development studies as a discipline. We aim to hear and build Indigenous voices and knowledges, for us and the next generations of development researchers and practitioners.

Research

As development studies researchers, we commit to working with and being guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from the beginning of research processes relating to their Peoples and Country. We will be partners in research. We will understand, respect and acknowledge Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) that is shared with us. Indigenous knowledge holders will direct how ICIP is shared or used, especially use that results in profit. We will work towards greater awareness; being prepared to identify and be confronted by our positionalities and biases when conducting research with Indigenous communities. We may not always be the experts. We will honour and respect cultural knowledge and practices.

Development practice

We commit to collective action when working with local communities in forming policies and funding guidelines, and designing development programmes, to ensure we take account of local contexts, aspirations and decision-making processes. We will obtain appropriate permissions and work with community in strengths-based co-design processes before engaging in programmes with Indigenous communities. We commit to advocating to governments and other donors to work with communities and listen deeply to community members before designing policies and programmes that impact them. We will work with communities in ways that enable empowerment, build on their own existing knowledges and build capacity to utilise both this and other knowledges for the benefit of Indigenous communities.
