How farms can partner with their value chain to share the costs and benefits of supporting First Nations Australian communities

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Executive summary

This study explored how value chains in different industries and countries collaborate for social enterprise, and the underlying factors and models for success. While assisting aspiring First Nations Australians to establish enterprise was the aim of the study (and is encouraged) the findings, including the 8 Step Framework for Success, can be applied to other mutually beneficial programs such as carbon, biodiversity and sustainability goals.

Across the world, governments are stepping back from supporting social enterprise in vulnerable First Nations and developing communities. For the non-government organisations and charities serving communities that depend on this support, including many in agriculture, aid is no longer a reliable plan.

Australian farmers are well-placed, geographically and with industry knowledge, to assist aspiring First Nations Australian farmers to achieve their goal of self-determination. Farmers are also under pressure from value chain partners who outsource the burden of their climate and reconciliation goals to them as a requirement for market access. Could a collaboration within value chains be the solution to the capital required for such enterprise? Could value chain partners benefit through achieving their sustainability or reconciliation goals?

These questions initiated an 18-month investigation into collaborations globally, exploring industries that support social enterprise or other initiatives outside business as usual. The investigation uncovered models of collaboration (four models are summarised in Table 1) between farms, processors, retailers, distributors and suppliers in 15 countries who are sharing both costs and benefits of investing in and supporting the communities around them. And doing so is building resilience in their businesses and communities.

Table 1: Four collaboration models based on real world examples

Model	Best when…	Community gets…	Example
Shared fund	A value chain shares a product and a margin to levy, or a profit to share	Training, services and infrastructure that scale with the business	MJF/Dilmah Tea; Fundesur; Driptech; WGAC
Facilitator	No single partner has all the capital, local knowledge or trust	Capital, expertise and market access via a trusted broker	Pollination; B1G1; ACIAR; RVO; Heifer International
Co-ownership	There is a viable enterprise and workable land tenure/agreements	Ownership, income and control — self-determination	Kitasoo Xia'xias (Mowi); ASI; 5 Senses, Heifer Int'l
Public-Private partnerships	There is higher risk or starting from scratch, research projects or large investment of funds needed	Infrastructure, projects too big for community to fund	ACIAR, RVO, Heifer Int'l, FrieslandCampina and Agriterra

The reported benefits are consistent: stronger social licence to operate, employees are more engaged, and more resilient supplier and customer relationships through shared values. The challenges are also consistent: impact is hard to measure, prioritising funding can dilute your values, and the hard truth that consumers are unwilling to accept increased costs—so the budget must come from somewhere else.

The investigation also revealed an underlying eight-step framework consistent with successful programs which increased the chance of a successful collaboration, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The central finding is that the most durable community investment is not charity but collaboration—where each partner in the value chain contributes something, each receives something back, and the community is a partner rather than a recipient. Reliance on donations leads to vulnerability when the funding ceases, so programs must be designed for self-sufficiency—through employment, enterprise and shared ownership—and endure beyond the initial funding.

Keywords: value chain collaboration; First Nations; community development; social licence; ESG; agribusiness partnerships

Figure 1: Framework for collaboration success (Source: Author, 2026).

Foreword

This report could have been titled "*Don't clap, throw pennies,*" something my paternal grandfather, Frank Williams, was known to say. It means congratulations won't pay the bills. This sentiment was one of three drivers that led to my successful application for a 2025 Nuffield Australia Scholarship, and ultimately, to this report.

I own and operate Humpty Doo Barramundi, a barramundi aquaculture farm on the traditional lands of the Limilngan-Wulna people in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia, together with my husband Dan Richards, a 2016 Nuffield Australia Scholar. It is a family operation, co-owned with his parents Bob Richards and Julii Tyson. Our three teenage children (at time of scholarship) are fifth generation Territorians, and ensuring a strong future for the NT is close to our hearts. I am passionate about healthy, sustainable protein and believe in the ability of people to power their own communities, rather than waiting for "someone" (usually government) to do "something" for them.

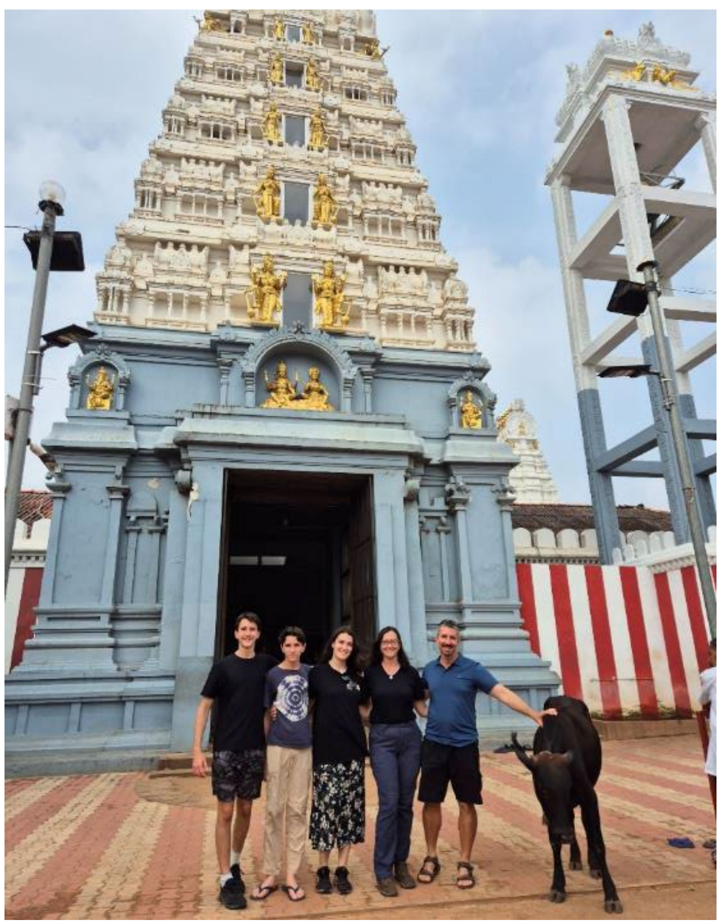

Figure 2: Richards family with friendly bull visiting Hindu temple in Sri Lanka (Source: Author, December 2025).

The first driver: the growing need

First Nations Australians* comprise around 30% of the NT's population, a significant proportion. The 2021 census revealed this demographic is the youngest and fastest growing in the country, with approximately one third under 15 years of age. Almost one quarter (24.4%) of First Nations Australians live in outer regional, remote and very remote parts of Australia where there is little industry or opportunity for economic participation (ABS, 2023). As a result, a significant 'gap' in health, education and representation in the justice system has emerged between First Nations and other Australians. Despite multiple reviews by the Australian Government, there is little evidence that this gap is closing, with ramifications not just on health, education and social outcomes, but on social cohesion.

> ***Note: First Nations or Traditional Owners is the culturally appropriate term to use when referencing original inhabitants of a country. I have generally complied with this but have used 'Aboriginal' or 'Indigenous' or 'Traditional Owner' when it applies to a publication or conversation referenced.***
> - Author

The second driver: don't clap, throw pennies

Humpty Doo Barramundi has won national awards for its work with First Nations Australians, yet we felt there was more we could do. Large national or multinational companies in the Australian agricultural value chain are increasingly outsourcing the burden of their climate and social goals to farmers as a requirement for market access. This expectation for farmers to bear these 'outside of farming business' costs, with little to no compensation, is of no direct benefit to farms, but required for these companies to meet their own reporting obligations.

The third driver: the penny dropped

Two conversations helped me combine these drivers into a possible solution. A frank discussion with our feed supplier revealed their desire to improve outcomes for First Nations Australians but their physical distance from the communities who need assistance was an obstacle. The second was a discussion with the inspiring and passionate Karen Sheldon of Saltbush Social Enterprises, an NT businesswoman who has made it her mission to "close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians" (Sheldon, pers.comm, 2024). Her proven seven step plan has uplifted hundreds of First Nations Australians, yet securing financial support for it is challenging since people with real life struggles do not fit neatly into quarterly reporting cycles or financial years.

I walked away from these conversations inspired. Could we connect organisations like Saltbush with our value chain partners to deliver programs benefitting First Nations communities *in collaboration*? We could make a lasting difference in remote communities where it is most needed, *and* our partners could achieve their stated environment, social and governance (ESG) or Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) goals. Could we learn from others already accomplishing this, and present the opportunity to our value chain? And how would we measure the wins for First Nations communities, for us, and for our partners?

Searching for examples of value chain collaborations that specifically benefit First Nations people around the world became the thread running through every conversation, meeting and piece of literature research over the following 18 months. I found a framework that underpins every successful collaboration I encountered (explored in more detail in Section 4 with recommendations set out later in this report). The framework encourages us to move beyond the "handouts" model and seek genuine, collaborative partnerships to deliver the self-determination sought by First Nations people around the world. While First Nations collaborations were the anchor for this study, the framework and models identified would work equally well for carbon, biodiversity and other, non-farm activities relevant to a farm and its value chain partners.

Table 2: Interviews and meetings that contributed to this report

Date	Name and organisation	Location
28 Feb 2025	Meeting with sponsor FRDC in Canberra	Canberra, Australia
7-21 March 2025	Nuffield Contemporary Scholars Conference (Auckland NZ); Venture Taranaki (Taranaki NZ); and AgriSea (Paeroa NZ);	New Zealand
18-26 May 2025 (Global Focus Program - GFP)	Edible Garden City (Bjorn Low)	Singapore + Taiwan
27 May-3 June 2025 (GFP)	PalmLife Berries (Craig and Stuart Toss); Driptech (Peter Henson); National Foods (Nigel Weller); Domboshawa Flower seed project; Malilangwe Wildlife Refuge; and Hakemala Trust;	Zimbabwe

Date	Name and organisation	Location
4-13 June 2025 (GFP)	Romanian Corn Farmer Assoc (FAPPR); Al Dahara and Top Farms	Romania + Poland
14–24 June 2025 (GFP)	Ostramar First Nations oyster farm	Chile
2-9 Nov 2025	B1G1 *Time to Rise* conference; ROLE Foundation Beach clean-up, John Fawcett Foundation Mobile Eye Clinic; and Cau Chocolate Factory and farm.	Bali, Indonesia
8 January 2026	Merril J Fernando Foundation (Kamal Subramainiam, Rehana Wettisinge)	Sri Lanka
18-22 March 2026	ACIAR (Luis de Almeida); MDF (Drew Johnson, Prakhyat Thapa); Orijem Timor (Daniel Leong); Timor Getaway (Flora Brytes); Thought Leader and ocean activist Birgit Hermann; and Aqua and Horticulture farm Alvin Smales.	Timor-leste
21-22 April 2026	Barcelona Seafood Show: ASC (Froukje Kruijssen)	Barcelona, Spain
29-30 April 2026	RVO (Christina Van De Heden); FrieslandCampina (Stijn Broekhuis); Agriterra (Jasper Spikker)	Netherlands
2025–26 (various)	5 Senses Coffee (Dean Gallagher); Who Gives A Crap (Simon Griffiths); Pollination (Lara Phillips); Aluminium Stewardship Initiative (Mark); ASC (Ellie Dixon); Su McCluskey, SeaFarms (Dominique Gautier), Tlowitsis Nation (Katie Maximick), Kitasoo Xia'Xias Nation (Isaiah Robinson)	Australia United Kingdom Canada

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- My husband Dan for his never-ending support, and children Isabel, Cameron and Alex for tolerating long periods without a mother (and sometimes a father).

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ASC	Aquaculture Stewardship Council
ASI	Aluminium Stewardship Initiative
B1G1	Buy 1, Give 1
BAU	Business as usual
BC	British Columbia (Canada)
ESG	Environmental, social and governance
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FRDC	Fisheries Research and Development Corporation
GFP	Nuffield's Global Focus Program
MDF	Market Development Facility
MJF	Merrill J. Fernando (Foundation)
NGO	Non-government organisation
NFF	National Farmers' Federation
NT	Northern Territory
NZ	New Zealand
OCHA	United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs
P.A.	Per annum
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan
RVO	Netherlands Enterprise Agency (Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WGAC	Who Gives A Crap

Objectives

This report investigates how farms and their value chain partners can share the costs and benefits of supporting First Nations communities. The research was guided by five objectives:

- **Understand** why farming value chain partners should collaborate to support development in First Nations and developing communities, particularly where this falls outside business as usual.
- **Examine** the benefits of collaboration for communities, farms, and value chain partners, and how costs and benefits can be shared.
- **Explore** the motivations behind collaborative partnerships and the challenges they face, including common failure points and how to avoid them.
- **Identify** models of good practice from other industries and countries that are successfully driving change in developing communities.
- **Inspire** and **equip** farming value chains to act with practical recommendations they can use to strengthen collaboration.

Tea Plantation workers outside of Ella, Sri Lanka (Source: Author, December 2025).

Introduction

Introduction

At a time when many Australian farmers are facing complex domestic and global challenges, the idea of farms supporting First Nations people aspiring to farm their own lands may seem counterintuitive. Geopolitical and monetary instability, combined with rising fuel costs and labour shortages at home, were just some of the concerns raised by National Farmers' Federation (NFF) in May prior to the Australian Government's 2026 Budget. (National Farmers Federation, 2026).

Yet engaging with First Nations Australians aspiring to become farmers could be part of the solution to that instability, especially where different players in the value chain collaborate. In a 2023 report, then NFF acting president David Jochinke challenged the sector to "do more" to attract Indigenous Australians into farming and support Indigenous agribusinesses.

> ***"There is a real and direct connection between the industry's growth ambitions, the economic empowerment of Indigenous peoples, and Closing the Gap across the full range of social outcomes."***
>
> —David Jochinke, Acting President, National Farmers Federation, 2023

Australian agriculture has good reason to take this connection seriously. Closing the Gap (in key life metrics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians) remains a national priority. Farmers, like many First Nations Australians, reside in rural and remote areas with limited access to services. The structure of land ownership in First Nations communities limits both access to capital and residents' ability to invest in agriculture or other enterprises. Farmers possess the operational knowledge needed for agricultural enterprise development; they also have the market relationships that can connect to the capital required.

First Nations Australians seek self-determination, but the common solution — leave it to government and donors — is failing. As discussed further on, global withdrawal from foreign aid has exposed the fragility of donor-funded systems.

Instead, this report argues that the value chain — the web of suppliers, processors, distributors, retailers and customers — is potentially a more patient, better-aligned and more durable source of support than the traditional donor model. Four models of collaboration, and the costs and benefits of each are discussed in detail in Section 3., concluding with a framework for establishing enduring collaborative relationships for farms and their value chain partners.

Weaving demonstration on Limilngan-Wulna country with On Country & Whenua Indigenous Women's Knowledge Exchange Project, (Source: Author, April 2025).

Section 1

Why farms are well-placed to engage with First Nations and developing communities

1. Why farms are well-placed to engage with First Nations and developing communities

Australian farmers are well placed to assist First Nations Australians who aspire to farm on the lands and waters where they live ('on country'). Like many First Nations communities, Australian farms are located well outside urban areas and the more remote or regional the farm, the more likely it is to abut, or overlap, a community. This is especially likely in the NT, where 98% of the land is subject to Native Title, either outright or through Crown Land.

Before colonisation, Australia consisted of overlapping lands (or territories) of over 250 different Indigenous Australian nations.

Native Title is the recognition of underlying pre-existing rights and interests under traditional laws and customs. Land rights are a grant of freehold or perpetual lease title.

First Nations Australians maintain sovereignty was never ceded and all Australians are increasingly recognising the different nations whose land they live, work and play on today.

- Author

Figure 3: Map of Australia showing the general locations of larger language, social or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia (Source: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1996).

First Nations Australians and farmers are included in the 27% of Australia's population residing outside urban areas (Australian Government, 2025). People in these areas share poorer access to education and health services, lower incomes, higher costs of living, greater usage of alcohol and other drugs, and on average live 15 years less than those living in our major cities. (Australian Government, 2025). Women in remote areas experience domestic violence at rates 41% higher than the national average. It seems our farmers and First Nations Australians have more in common than geography, and farmers understand the challenges of living far from services urban dwellers take for granted.

The most significant organisations in a farm’s value chain are often large national supermarkets, multinational suppliers of fertiliser, pesticides, seed and equipment. Most have public commitments to environment, social and governance (ESG) or Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) goals that include engagement with First Nations people. However, these organisations are typically headquartered in large towns or capital cities, hours (or sometimes days) of travel from regional areas where many First Nations Australians, and many of our farms, are located.

1.1 The need to Close the Gap

There is a ‘gap’ in social, health, justice, education and economic outcomes between First Nations and other Australians, and the first *Closing the Gap* report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) outlined commitments to remedy the situation. Almost fifteen years later, the Productivity Commissioner reported that Australian governments “are not adequately delivering on the commitments … and have not fully grasped the scale of change required [to Close the Gap]” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2025, p. 13).

One of the recommendations targets an increase in employment of First Nations Australians to 62% (Commonwealth of Australia, 2025, pp. 50-55), relying on public funding through grants or procurement policies to achieve this.

If providing economic opportunities for First Nations Australians is an important step towards Closing the Gap, are public servants best placed to deliver community and enterprise development work when they may not have experience in either? A farmer living and operating their business in the same region as a First Nations community, familiar with the challenges of operating in that environment, is arguably far better placed to assist an emerging agricultural enterprise.

1.2 Aid is not the answer to sustainable change

Geopolitical uncertainty is seeing a reduction, and even withdrawal, of aid globally. In January 2026, while I was visiting Dilmah Tea’s Merril J. Fernando Foundation (MJF) in Sri Lanka, the United States announced its withdrawal from more than 30 international organisations and UN entities (United States of America, 2026). The world saw a historic 23.1% reduction in foreign aid between 2024 and 2025, with a further decrease of 6.9% forecast for 2026 (OECD, 2026). The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported their work was "underfunded, overstretched and under attack." (OCHA, 2025). This withdrawal of funding had an immediate effect on non-government organisations (NGOs): programs stalled, supply chains froze, and millions were left exposed — not because solutions did not exist, but because they were never built to stand on their own (Ojomo, 2025).

A common thread running through interviews with organisations contributing to this report indicated the need for an enduring business model to underpin any program. Donations can relieve suffering in the short term, but they rarely create the lasting prosperity of a genuine business model. That is the gap that established businesses and their relationships, are uniquely placed to fill.

1.3 Employment as a powerful intervention: how business can support

Employment is seen as the answer to Zimbabwe's poverty, and the "single biggest intervention to change people's circumstances," according to Shepard from the Malilangwe Wildlife Refuge's Hakemala Trust (Shepard, pers.comm, June 2025). Without job prospects, people in the villages surrounding Malilangwe are vulnerable to falling into crime and drugs. Hakemala is working with young people from the surrounding villages, challenging them to stay in school and find work at the refuge as rangers, security against poachers, or to become teachers or medical professionals in nearby villages.

Figure 4: Nuffield GFP3 group visiting a village school in Zimbabwe (Source: Author, June 2025).

Eradicating poverty through employment is an ambition shared by some of Zimbabwe's major industries. Peter Henson, Managing Director of Driptech has an ambition to double employment across their businesses to 100,000 people over the next 30 years – requiring the company to scale 50% over that time (Henson, pers.comm, 2025). National Foods Managing Executive Nigel Weller is creating professional opportunities for local people through apprenticeships and training to ease the 'diaspora' of people migrating to neighbouring countries for work (Weller, pers.comm, 2025).

The Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation of Klemtu in British Columbia have created a partnership with Norwegian salmon farmer Mowi. Eight hundred kilometres north of Vancouver, Klemtu was a remote but thriving commercial fishing town until the industry collapsed in the 1960s. According to Katie Maximick of Tlowitsis Nation, the town's employment rate fell to 5%, and crime, substance abuse and suicide rates soared (Maximick, pers.comm, 2026). Then in 1998 Mowi reinstated the community's salmon smokehouse, handing it back to the Nation to operate. CEO of Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation Isaiah Robinson said they didn't want handouts (called 'disbursements'). For them, self-determination is economic, underpinned by employment. (Robinson, pers.comm, 2026).

> ***"People need to be busy and have an active purpose. If people are unhealthy and you give them a disbursement of, say, $100,000, it's going to be problematic."***
>
> — Isaiah Robinson, CEO, Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation, British Columbia

The partnership between Mowi and the Kitasoo Xai'xais contains a requirement that 70% of the town be employed for Mowi to operate. The Nation smokes, packages and sells the salmon under their own brand at specialty retailers. With the partnership, employment in Klemtu has risen to around 95% and antisocial behaviour has fallen (Maximick, pers.comm, 2026).

1.4 Social capital, social cohesion and social licence: invisible assets

There is a deeper, less visible reason farms should care about the economic well-being of their First Nations neighbours: social cohesion (connectedness) through social capital, leading to the licence to operate. The Edelman Trust's 2025 report found that people with a sense of grievance are more likely to believe a business is not doing enough to address societal issues (Edelman Trust Institute, 2025), with potential impact to affect that business' social licence to operate. A farming business that is seen by its community as involved and contributing will have more social capital, and the social licence to operate, than one that is out of sight and out of mind.

Agriculture's role in creating social cohesion underpins the Netherlands' economic success, according to Jasper Spikker, CEO of Netherlands' NGO Agriterra (pictured with the author in Figure 11). The need to manage collective resources like soil and water, as well as navigate market forces, saw the development of farmers' cooperatives which are respected in the Netherlands as a vehicle for uniting industry and community, and for their solid governance. (Spikker, pers.comm, 2026).

Farms that build social capital and socially cohesive communities are also building social licence. This 'licence' by the community to operate must not be confused with the legal licence granted by statutory bodies. Community acceptance for salmon farming in Tasmania, Australia has dropped over the past decade, with community and environmental groups advocating for farms to be relocated on land or shut down entirely. In Europe, there is pressure for salmon farms to leave the fjords and become land-based, and pressure on the Canadian government led to policy change, determining open net salmon farming in BC must cease by 2029.

Malilangwe is building social licence with surrounding villages. The reserve provides sanctuary for many animals that threaten the crops of surrounding villages. By providing opportunities and incentives like employment for their young people to stay, the surrounding villages are more likely to see Malilangwe as an asset.

1.5 The capital barrier — and how the value chain can help

First Nations Australians may have land and aspirations to farm, but they often lack access to capital to finance their aspirations, a common barrier for First Nations people globally. In Australia, obtaining a loan is dependent on the borrower's demonstrated capacity to repay, the credit history, and collateral for security. According to Jake Berthelot of First Australians Capital, the challenge for remote Australian First Nations communities is that land is collectively held rather than individually owned, resources are shared and the absence of economy means there is no demonstrable collateral, credit history, or even identification documents required to participate in the mainstream lending economy (Berthelot, 2025). Interviews with people from Brazil, Timor-Leste, New Zealand (NZ) and Canada confirm this is not isolated to First Nations people in Australia. Andre del Gaudio (formerly Nuveen, Brasil) told that Brazilian 'landless' peoples are given land to farm but no resources or ownership of land (del Gaudio, pers.comm, 2025). ACIAR's Timor-Leste Country Manager Luis del Almeida explained that two periods of colonial occupation in the country meant traditional land ownership is difficult to determine (del Almeida, pers.comm, 2026). Lisa Warbick, who visited Humpty Doo Barramundi with On Country and Te Pu Oranga Whenua Indigenous Women on Country initiative shared how NZ First Nations people are caught between government policy, cultural collective

Figure 5: On Country & Whenua Indigenous Women's Knowledge Exchange Project visiting Limilngan-Wulna land in the NT, Australia (Source: Author, April 2025).

ownership rules, and poverty (Warbick, pers.comm, 2025). In Canada, similar ownership structures on First Nations land restricts credit for development. 2024 Nuffield Canada Scholar Tatum Claypool explained how lenders like Canada's Farm Credit Canada have created their own financing models targeting First Nations women and youth (Claypool, pers.comm, 2025).

Value chain collaborations could do what a bank will not. The opportunity exists for Australian farmers to engage with aspiring First Nations farmers not alone, but in genuine partnership with their value chain – benefitting First Nations people who want to live and farm on country, while strengthening the value chain's own connections through improved trust, stronger social licence and stronger communities.

1.6 A closer look: the case in remote Australia

Agriculture provides a vehicle for aspiring First Nations Australian farmers to gain economic self-determination and is appropriate for a culture connected to land. However, any initiative needs to be culturally aligned with the community's internal drive to succeed. In her peer-reviewed investigation into First Nations economies, Dr Ann Fleming argues that a combination of desire for economic independence plus an established business case are needed to build self-sustaining economies in First Nations communities, and that neither can succeed alone (Fleming, 2015, pp. 5-6). Fleming alleges this is the reason agriculture struggles to attract First Nations employees, and publicly funded programs fail. Culturally-aligned programs are more effective than mainstream programs at engaging remote-living Indigenous Australians in long-term work — yet governments remain reluctant to invest, and the commercial sector lacks confidence that doing so will generate returns (Fleming, 2015).

This is the space a farm, with support from its value chain, can fill. Fleming's finding — that the driver for Indigenous engagement is not wealth but self-determination and economic independence means the solution is not to generate employment on farm, but to help build a culturally-aligned business it owns and runs. Our farms are well-placed geographically, with the access to markets and resources needed to help First Nations communities to build capacity on their lands, with strengthened social capital and cohesion as a further benefit.

Demonstrating cocoa growing in Bali, Indonesia (Source: Author, November 2025)

Section 2

Collaborative success: sharing costs and benefits across the value chain

2. Collaborative success: sharing costs and benefits across the value chain

Sharing costs and benefits across the value chain through collaboration has a higher chance of success than a farm or business acting in isolation. Community increasingly looks to business to solve the big social problems, but business can't act alone. It needs cooperation to genuinely repair social fractures (Edelman Trust Institute, 2025).

2.1 We can't price our way out through procurement

There is increased pressure from community expectations, and resulting influence on policy and legislation, for farms and businesses to act on climate and social issues like sustainable production, community contribution and climate change. These are areas outside business as usual and theoretically should command a higher purchase price to compensate for the lost productivity and higher cost to produce. However, while desired by consumers, very few people will actually pay extra for these attributes.

Consumer focus group research undertaken by Humpty Doo Barramundi supports this. Shoppers or corporate buyers will readily say sustainability matters to them, but very few will change their behaviour or pay more for it. Sasha Cordeiro of Bedrock Insight told Humpty Doo Barramundi "Although many will say it's important … they just don't want to have to do anything differently, because that's hard." (Cordeiro, pers.comm, 2025)

An interview with Aquaculture Stewardship Council's Human Rights Programme Manager Froukje Kruijssen and Australian Market Development Manager Ellie Dixon corroborates this:

> ***"Retailers are caught in the tension between sustainability and price."***
>
> — Dixon, Aquaculture Stewardship Certification

Some organisations have found creative ways to fund these initiatives not from procurement or marketing, but from other budget lines. Climate and sustainability investment firm Pollination believes attracting investment in climate and social goals is a structural problem. In an interview with Lara Phillips, Pollination's agri-food and fibre adviser, Phillips explained that while large companies have public commitments to RAPs and ESG strategies, their procurement teams are pressured to maintain margins and push costs back down the chain to growers. Pollination believes these expenses belong in the strategic, risk and finance functions, where climate, nature and licence to operate from First Nations people are increasingly considered material risks (Phillips, pers.comm, 2025).

If the cost of environment, climate and social enterprise cannot be recovered from the consumer, it must be shared across the value chain some other way. There needs to be an incentive for doing so.

2.2 Business benefits from collaboration

With social enterprise at the core, a business may find support not afforded to a business that exists purely for profit. Subscription toilet paper service Who Gives A Crap (WGAC) was founded in 2012 as a social enterprise to address a lack of access to sanitation around the world. WGAC has donated AUD$13,379,250 to date (WGAC-Our Impact, 2026) through a model where purpose drives sales, leveraging the downstream value chain (consumers) to fund its purpose: 50% of profits are donated to NGO partners to deliver the programs.

Figure 6: Author with WGAC CEO Simon Griffiths in Darwin, Australia (Source: Author, October 2024).

When I asked co-founder and CEO Simon Griffiths, as pictured in Figure 6, whether WGAC's success was due to the social enterprise outcomes, company values or the convenience of having a basic good delivered to households, Griffiths answered:

> ***"It's a three-legged stool — marketing + values + business model. It would work without one, but the stool wouldn't stand up so well.***
>
> — Simon Griffiths, co-founder and CEO, Who Gives A Crap

During the COVID-19 panic-buying of toilet paper, shoppers and distributors alike were caught short. Griffiths told how close relationships with their suppliers meant WGAC was prioritised over other distributors, and they could continue to fill their orders.

> ***"We kept really tight relationships with our producers for the six weeks before COVID really hit … They gave it [their toilet paper] all to us because we'd been there through the whole journey with them up until that moment."***
> — Simon Griffiths, co-founder and CEO, Who Gives A Crap

This is critically important. An interrupted supply would create a circular effect: no product to sell, impacting their ability to fulfil their company purpose (and social contract with customers) of improving sanitation, therefore impacting their brand and future sales. Having built the relationship with their value chain, sales persisted because suppliers continued to prioritise them during this unanticipated side-effect of the global pandemic, sustaining the support of sanitation programs where it was needed.

Family business Driptech takes the long-term view: if their customers are growing, then Driptech will grow. A valued patron of Nuffield Zimbabwe, Driptech is investing in agriculture, enabling their value chain partners to grow, and fortifying the company's future in Zimbabwe's volatile business environment, despite fiscal and economic ambiguity.

2.3 Non-financial benefits of strong relationships

Engaging the value chain for the purpose of social enterprise has benefits outside of financial return. B1G1 ('Buy1 Give1') was established by Masami Sato, an energetic entrepreneur who believes every business has the power to create a significant difference. She developed an online portal populated with pre-assessed social enterprises ('Worthy Causes') to facilitate donations from the business community. At the B1G1 *Time to Rise* conference in Indonesia I spoke with business owners from around the world who turn everyday transactions into donations triggered by a quote, an invoice or an enquiry. Astonishingly, most were not leveraging their donations for marketing.

Figure 7: Beach clean-up for a B1G1 Worthy Cause at the-Time to Rise conference in Bali, Indonesia (Source: Author, November 2025)

Minna Salmesvuo, founder of The Social Tribe, described how giving through B1G1 clarified her company's values, helping them attract "sticky clients" — the loyal, values-aligned clients who stayed loyal even through a significant business downturn in March 2026.

> ***"Those clients see themselves as part of the bigger picture, and not just as transactions."***
> — Minna Salmesvuo, The Social Tribe (Australia)

B1G1 members commonly reported benefits like more engaged staff with improved retention and values alignment with clients "I have less, but better-quality clients who choose me because we have the same values" (Salmesvuo, pers.comm, 2025). Another member, leadership entrepreneur Sarah Pirie-Nally, agreed: "My team suddenly cares. My customers too." (Pirie-Nally, pers.comm, 2025)

Collaboration at different stages of the value chain created benefits for partners. Stability in volatile environments, strong business relationships, more engaged and loyal staff are some of the more consistently mentioned advantages of collaboration. Businesses like WGAC and B1G1 were established primarily for social good – a model that engages consumers as partners in the social goal. But in most cases, with cost-of-living pressures and highly competitive markets, additional costs cannot be passed on to consumers any more than we can afford for them to be passed back up the chain to farmers.

Smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe (Source: Author, June 2025)

Section 3

Four models that work — and how the community benefits

3. Four models that work — and how the community benefits

Investigating collaborations across different industries and different countries revealed four broad models. They are not mutually exclusive — several organisations use more than one — but they are separated here along with real-life examples to demonstrate how the model works, and potential problems to avoid.

3.1 The shared fund model (levy or profit-share into a foundation)

Partners across a value chain contribute a defined share — a levy per unit, or a percentage of profit — into a foundation or trust that delivers community programs. It is simple, transparent governance and scales with the business.

Honduras — Fundesur. The ‘social engine of the shrimp farming industry’ (Fundesur, 2026) in southern Honduras, Fundesur is a collaboration between shrimp farms, exporters and other value chain partners to aid impoverished regions around the farms. Seafarms Sustainability Manager Dominique Gautier explained a levy of two cents per pound of shrimp exported raises roughly US$1 million p.a. in seed capital, attracting further donations through a public-private partnership model (explained in detail at 3.3, below). Fundesur has built a kindergarten, ten medical centres and employs physicians. It also generates benefits for the wider community through employment in support services like water taxis and catering for farm employees, improved infrastructure (roads and bridges) and affordable groceries. This has also solved a business problem, moving the company’s relationship with the community from haphazard to strategic, building the agreement and social licence that ended local disputes. (Gautier, pers.comm, 2026)

Sri Lanka — the MJF Foundation. In a meeting at the Merril J. Fernando Foundation (MJF) facility outside Colombo, General Manager Kamal Subramaniam explained that the family behind Dilmah Tea established the MJF on the philosophy that “business is a matter of human service” (Subramaniam, pers.comm, 2026). Beginning with early-years and special-needs education for tea-plantation communities, it has grown into literacy, ICT, culinary and entrepreneurship programs delivered through centres placed across Sri Lanka, financed through 15% of Dilmah Tea’s pre-tax profit, and anchored by good governance and strategic alignment between the organisations. The model extends to value-chain partners

Figure 8: Community Library at MJF Centre in Colombo, Sri Lanka (Source: Author, January 2026).

with shared values. Tokai Co-op, Dilmah's distributor in Japan, has supported MJF for eight years, visiting annually to personally deliver school supplies. The facility's Business Manager Rehana Wettasinghe defines MJF's success as students becoming resourceful and self-sufficient, no longer reliant on handouts, and returning to give back through MJF centres, such as the one shown in Figure 8. (Wettasinghe, pers.comm, 2026)

Zimbabwe — Driptech. Driptech channels 25% of annual profit into a community trust for orphans, widows, schools and Nuffield Zimbabwe, deliberately investing in businesses that develop the community, such as nail and screw manufacturing, irrigation supplies, water storage and farming, rather than luxury goods. Partnering with customers such as PalmLife to develop a village school means PalmLife's ongoing success (social licence in the community) will contribute to Driptech's long-term success, strengthening ties across the chain.

How the partnership benefits: services and infrastructure (clinics, classrooms, sanitation) the community could not otherwise fund, delivered at a scale that grows with the business, and transparent governance that builds trust.

Watch-out: a fund isn't failsafe if it doesn't design for self-sufficiency.

3.2 The facilitator 'vehicle' model

A neutral, for-purpose intermediary aggregates capital and expertise from several value-chain partners, sources the on-the-ground delivery partner, and reports back. It is powerful where no single partner has all the capital, the local knowledge, or the trust required.

Australia — Who Gives A Crap. Contributes 50% of profits to build toilets in developing countries, partnering with established delivery organisations in country. Its successful subscription business model has enabled it to donate AUD$13,379,250 since it was established. WGAC treats its donations as a core business expense, and customers love the values behind the brand as much as they love the convenience.

Figure 9: Nuffield GFP3 group visiting Nuffield Zimbabwe Scholar Phil Weller on his farm in Zimbabwe (Source: Author, May 2025).

Zimbabwe – Driptech and National Foods. Both are targeting alleviation of poverty with employment as the vehicle. Driptech's bold target to double employment in their businesses over the next 30 years will see them scaling at 50% to achieve this goal (Henson, pers.comm, 2025). National Foods is also on a growth trajectory, training professionals and creating opportunities to entice skilled people to stay in Zimbabwe (Weller, pers.comm, 2025) despite (and because of) Zimbabwe's economic, fiscal and political instability.

Australia – Pollination. Aggregates capital from global brands and invests in on-farm, nature-based solutions — repairing soil erosion, revegetating riparian zones — while working with First Nations communities to advise on appropriate species, source seedlings and be properly remunerated for their involvement. Pollination then reports progress back to the brands who need that evidence to meet ambitious targets and avoid accusations of greenwashing. In this model, value-chain partners share the cost of engaging First Nations enterprises, with each party benefitting: brands get verified progress, growers get funded on-farm works, and First Nations communities get paid for their knowledge and a role in the outcome.

Singapore (global) – B1G1. A conduit created to facilitate business donations, vetting 'Worthy Causes' globally and connecting them to business. Enables small businesses to support a cause with confidence and minimal overhead. Deliberately favours long-term causes over short-term crisis programs. John Fawcett Foundation's mobile eye clinics in Indonesia, as shown in Figure 10, (a B1G1 partner since 2018) see around 110,000 people and perform 4,500 cataract surgeries per van each year.

Figure 10: Visiting the John Fawcett Foundation Mobile Eye Clinic in Bali, Indonesia (Source: Author, November 2025).

How the partnership benefits: funding is stable and built into the business model. Benefits are measurable for both the community and the value chain partners.

Watch out for: funding is still reliant on business outcomes and could stop if the business changes focus or has financial difficulties.

3.3 Public–private partnership model

While there was an attempt to avoid government-funded models, public-private partnerships earn a mention here for their prevalence in global aid, since government contribution can de-risk investment for private partners.

Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend - Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) partners with government organisations (including ACIAR) on agricultural enterprises in developing countries.

RVO Program Coordinator Christina van der Heden explained their interest ranges from cocoa in Indonesia, coffee in Africa and programs in South America. RVO co-funds roughly 50% of program costs and requires private partners to form a partnership with the community before applying — the private partners contribute the other half and acquire benefits like market access in that country (Heden, pers.comm, 2026).

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is the Australian Government's agricultural aid vehicle focusing on neighbouring communities in Asia and the Pacific. ACIAR Timor-Leste partners with Australian universities and at least one local government department to investigate food security and economic diversification for the country that relies on a dwindling oil and gas industry and imports 60% of its caloric needs while 70% of the population are subsistence farming. Ongoing sustainability and implementation of research is their concern, along with valuing the cultural and community benefits that are harder to quantify. (Del Almeida, pers.comm, 2026)

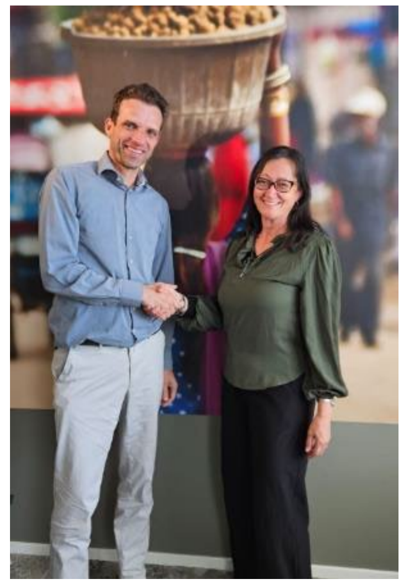
Figure 11: Author with Jasper Spikker, Agriterra, Netherlands (Source: Author, April 2026).

Agriterra and FrieslandCampina Dutch dairy cooperatives establishing dairy industries in Africa and Asia, providing economic diversity, employment and competitive value chains for in-country farmers. The benefit to coop members is the new markets for supplies, genetics, equipment and training. (Spikker, pers.comm, 2026) (Broekuis, pers.comm, 2026)

How the partnership benefits: access to capital, expertise and markets that partners could not reach alone, along with a diversified economy and established value chains.

Watch-out: the facilitator must hold the line on its values and prioritise long-term viability over "following the money".

3.4 Co-ownership model (the community as a commercial partner)

The community is not just a beneficiary but a commercial partner with a genuine stake — through co-ownership, employment guarantees or direct investment. This model is most aligned with First Nations aspirations for economic self-determination.

Canada — Mowi and Kitasoo Xia'xias Nation partnership. In British Columbia (BC), salmon farming injects around CAD$1.2 billion into the economy, with First Nations receiving about

CAD$51 million a year, 700 direct jobs and approximately 1,500 indirect jobs through “trickle-down” industries such as net-washing and water-taxi services (Maximick, pers.comm, 2026). The agreements are local and individual: some involve royalties or disbursements; others guarantee employment with penalties for non-compliance. At Klemtu in BC, Norwegian salmon farmer Mowi gifted the smokehouse to the Kitasoo Xai’xais Nation and under an agreement employ them to process, pack and distribute salmon under their own brand. Klemtu employment rates rose from 5% to 95% since the initiative began. The employment agreement permits Mowi to operate in the region and the community benefits from self-determination through employment and asset ownership. (Robinson, 2026)

Aluminium Stewardship Initiative (ASI). Members aim to create a positive impact on communities adjacent mine sites. Many of Australia’s mines are located on First Nations land and were granted a legal licence to operate before the free prior and informed consent (FPIC), increasingly a requirement for stewardship certification across industries, was obtained. ASI is helping to establish alternative income streams to support First Nations communities when mining (and royalties from mining) cease. ASI Director of Research Mark Annandale explained that ASI has developed an app in conjunction with Australian universities and people from the community to assess rehabilitation of mine sites in the NT, leveraging cultural knowledge to observe and collect data on flora and fauna which is uploaded once the device is back in range (Annandale, pers.comm, 2026) The mining company has real time insight into the status of their impact, and the people know their observations and concerns are validated.

5 Senses Coffee Roasters. Founder Dean Gallagher has built a transparent coffee value chain to disrupt the current model of underpaying farmers and reliance on donors. Investing in Sumatran farmers, 5 Senses purchased the Tiga Raja mill for AUD$400,000, gifting 15% upfront to the farmers’ cooperative. It employs a full-time agronomist and distributes seedlings to support growers demonstrating good practice – 5,000 in late 2024, with a further 40,000 under cultivation. For 5 Senses the arrangement is deliberately commercial, and farmers are the ultimate beneficiaries of a re-awakened supply

Figure 12: Coffee growing in Bali, Indonesia (Source: Author, November 2025).

chain. The coffee is roasted by 5 Senses and distributed to Australian coffee shops who value the social responsibility that underpins the brand (Gallagher, pers.comm, 2026).

Heifer International. An NGO that uses donor funding to engage consultant Gijs Eikelenboom**,** a Dutch dairy advisor, to build sustainable value chains through establishing co-operatives and training the managers in Uganda and Malawi. Eikelenboom contributes unpaid time and uses his experience to create value chains based on market prices, removes value-destroying middlemen, and blends business and culture by employing university graduates from the community to work alongside the elders (Eikelenboom, pers.comm, 2026).

Gijs Eikelenboom retired from a corporate role in feed manufacturing over 20 years ago with the goal to use his knowledge to grow developing communities.

He is driven by four values:

1. ***Cooperate with people***
2. ***Business-oriented***
3. ***Adventure***
4. ***Sustainability.***

Gijs identified a four-year cycle that made most aid projects unsustainable: NGOs and charities establish start-ups based on donor funding, rather than a sustainable business model. They rarely last four years before the funds dry up and the NGO moves on, leaving a community worse off than before.

- Author

How the partnership benefits: ownership, income and economic self-determination, underpinned by a viable business model. Social licence to operate is a durable form of benefit, and the least dependent on the goodwill of any one partner.

Watch-out: co-ownership requires trust, shared values and functioning land tenure.

Author visiting a watermelon and aquaculture farmer in Timor Leste, (Source: Author, March 2026)

Section 4

Success factors, challenges, and how to start the conversation

4. Success factors, challenges, and how to start the conversation

The experience of organisations interviewed for this report led to the development of the criteria for success set out below. These criteria weigh the benefits and challenges of collaborative partnerships, in the hope of providing a framework for future collaborations to succeed.

4.1 A framework for success

Success is measured differently by different partners. For some, success is measured by self-sufficiency of a community or enterprise; for others, it is measured by participation. Some say a social program is successful when the community no longer needs it (Gallagher, pers.comm, 2026), or when beneficiaries return to give back to their community (Wettasinghe, pers.comm, 2026).

- **Shared values:** A recurring theme throughout all my conversations: successful partnerships are founded on shared values. Agrisea works with Māori in NZ. CEO Clare Bradley says, “Collaboration takes trust - in the communities you're working with, and with your collaboration partners,” (Bradley, pers.comm, 2026). Jasper Spikker, CEO at Agriterra goes one step further “Turn down anything not aligned with your values, even at the risk of losing funding or reducing impact,” (Spikker, pers.comm, 2026).
- **Agree what success looks like — before you start.** Agreeing the measures of success with all partners at the beginning is crucial. A program could miss critical funding, or lose their social licence, if this is not agreed upfront. (Annandale, pers.comm, 2026). In Timor-Leste, a community valued the cultural ties that were created during a program while donors thought it was a failure. Partners who skip this step end up measuring different factors and judging the same program differently. (Del Almeida, pers.comm, 2026)
- **Design for self-sufficiency from the beginning.** Programs built chasing donor funding often fail to be sustainable (Eikelenboom, pers.comm, 2026). Whether it’s aid programs in Timor-Leste, coffee in Indonesia, micro-entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka or establishing new markets in Vietnam and Uganda, all agreed that the collaboration partners had to be confident the business model was viable before they would support it. Flora Brytes, as pictured in Figure 13, in Timor-

Figure 13: Author with Flora Brytes in Timor-leste (Source: Author, March 2026).

Leste looks for partners with complementary skills and expertise she does not already have (Brytes, pers.comm, 2026). RVO and FrieslandCampina both insist their partners have 'skin in the game' — a financial stake ensures genuine commitment (Heden, pers.comm, 2026), (Broekhuis, pers.comm, 2026). This is the heart of *The Prosperity Paradox* (Clayton Christensen, 2018): 'push' strategies deliver inputs without building incentives, providing short-term relief but fail to scale. 'Pull' strategies, rooted in market-creating innovation, align profit and demand and sustain themselves.

- **Put the community at the centre.** Speak with the community and understand what they need. Programs must be culturally aligned, and people must be central to a program (Del Almeida, pers.comm, 2026) (Thapa, pers.comm, 2026) (Fleming, 2015). FPIC is increasingly required in aquaculture and mining alike, with some communities and nations now demanding retrospective FPIC for established businesses (Annandale, pers.comm, 2026) (Kruijssen, pers.comm, 2026).
- **Employment over handouts.** From Driptech to the Kitasoo Xai'xais Nation, the most respected programs create purpose and work, not dependence through disbursements or royalties.

Figure 14: Traditional oyster farming in southern Chile (Source: Author, June 2025).

A tested framework for First Nations enterprise.

These success factors echo a structured framework developed and field-tested for remote First Nations enterprise in northern Australia (Fleming, 2015). Drawn from a practitioners' workshop and Australian and international studies, it groups nine success factors under three themes, and warns that if a program fails to address even one of them, it is likely to fail overall unless that gap is deliberately addressed:

Cultural engagement

- effective cross-cultural communication and relationship-building
- clarifying the community's own aspirations and goals
- valuing both traditional and Western knowledge.

Business development

- research and development that improves commercial viability and certainty
- capacity-building of both individuals and the community organisations that govern and run the enterprise
- access to infrastructure, secure land tenure, and adequate finance over realistic timeframes.

Market drivers

- identifying viable internal (community) and external (mainstream) markets
- recognising the heavy impact of government policy on viability
- treating cultural primacy and self-determination as the foundation that underpins everything else.

4.2 What didn't work — the lessons from failure

Not every partnership explored during this study succeeded, and since failures are as instructive as successes, I have included them here.

1. Bjorn Low, Chief Urban Farmer at Singapore's Edible Garden City, as shown in Figure 15, candidly told our group his cooperative had failed in their goal to reliably supply high end restaurants, as it had no viable business model. However, the social impact from employing people with disabilities is valued by the Singapore Government donor (Low, pers.comm, 2025).

Figure 15: Nuffield GFP groups visit Edible Garden City Singapore (Source: Author, May 2025).

2. Funding was withheld from a program completed by ASI because the success measures and next steps were not agreed at the beginning (Annandale, pers.comm, 2026).
3. When benefits are distributed unevenly, disputes can arise. In Honduras, not everyone benefits from employment in the shrimp industry and grievances were levelled against farms, which led to the establishment of Fundesur (Gautier, pers.comm, 2026). In Zimbabwe, Bruce Clee from Malilangwe explained that benefits aimed at community level, rather than individual level, did not have the desired effect. For example, a school built to discourage the community from poaching was not valued by people without children, and for them poaching offered the better benefit (Clee, pers.comm, 2025).
4. Prioritising shareholder interests ahead of community needs leads to a loss of social licence to operate, especially where large corporate farms were established before FPIC requirements existed, such as salmon farming in Chile (Kruijssen, pers.comm, 2026).
5. Political and regulatory risk can lead to structural failures. Unresolved land tenure and the absence of clear land titles make co-ownership difficult, an issue affecting First Nations people in Timor-Leste, Zimbabwe, Canada, NZ Brazil and Australia. The looming 2029 ban on open-net-pen salmon farming in BC, Canada threatens the very agreements that transformed communities (Maximick, pers.comm, 2026)

The lesson is not that these models failed, but that they succeed only when they are designed for self-sufficiency, share their benefits widely, and stay honest about what they can and cannot measure.

4.3 Challenges and how to avoid them

Challenge / what went wrong	Where I saw it	How to avoid it
'Push' programs collapse when funding ends (the well no one repairs)	Christensen / Prosperity Paradox; Heifer International (co-ops fold after 4 years)	Design for self-sufficiency; build an underlying business, not a donation pipeline
ESG costs can't be passed to consumers; procurement squeezes growers	Pollination; ASC; General Notes	Find budget outside procurement — in risk, strategy and finance functions
Measuring social impact is genuinely hard; funders demand the wrong metrics	ACIAR (cultural impact not valued); ASI (UK funder withheld final payment over future numbers)	Agree realistic, mixed economic/cultural measures up front
'Following the money' dilutes your values	Agriterra ('turn down anything not aligned with values, even at risk of losing $'); Heifer Int'l	Be willing to decline misaligned funding; keep values explicit and visible
Not everyone benefits, so disputes arise	Honduras shrimp (NGO-led community disputes); Malilangwe Trust (anti-poaching measures failed at first)	Move from haphazard to strategic, proactive community liaison; widen who benefits
Value-destroying middlemen capture the margin	Heifer International (Uganda/Malawi); 5 Senses	Build transparent chains; value chain must charge fair prices for inputs and pay fair value for goods
Greenwashing and partners with no real commitment	RVO; Pollination	Vet partners; require evidence and a genuine stake
Land tenure and titles are unresolved	Timor-Leste; Zimbabwe, Canada, New Zealand, Brazil,Australia (insecure tenure removes incentive to invest, restricts access to capital)	Choose a model that fits the legal reality; confirm tenure prior to commencing
Political and regulatory risk can undo an agreement	Canada (looming 2029 open-net-pen ban); Zimbabwe (fiscal); RVO (sovereign risk concerns)	Prefer public–private over government-to-government; stay nimble; diversify

Woman sells corn from her roadside stall in Sri Lanka (Source: Author, December 2025)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The inspiration for this research was to solve a problem: how to sustainably fund support for aspiring First Nations farmers through leveraging existing relationships within the value chain, with the secondary aim of creating strong, enduring connections with those value chain partners. Investigating models of collaboration across industries and communities outside of agriculture allowed deeper exploration of the opportunities and challenges than I would have found had I focused on farming and First Nations communities alone. I hope readers can apply findings from this report to facilitate collaboration with organisations in their own ecosystem and solve some big problems worth solving.

Three conclusions follow.

First: the case for acting is strong and growing: social licence, workforce growth, social capital, and the collapse of the donor model all point the same way,

Second: donor models are risky and unreliable. The value chain is potentially a more patient and better-aligned source of support than government or aid, with real benefits for the value chain collaborators that create a win-win-win environment.

Third: whether the chosen path is a shared fund, facilitator, co-ownership or a public-private partnership, the success factors remain the same. Before commencing, the community, delivery partner and value chain collaborators must ensure shared values are established, measures of success are agreed in advance, community needs sit central to the program, and the design is built to remain viable once the program ends.

While international programs often rely on NGO delivery partners, the Australian farming sector is well placed to lead this work. Many of our farming regions are remote and adjacent First Nations country, while many of our value chains span large corporates who hold ESG commitments to First Nations people they are struggling to deliver on. In their everyday business relationships, farmers already hold the engine that the people I met have used to change lives. My hope is that readers will be as inspired to reach into their value chains and work together — not out of charity, but because, as Agriterra's Spikker put it simply, "it can never harm to help somebody out".

Recommendations

1. **Map your value chain and name the problem.** List your suppliers, processors, distributors, customers and the community you sit within. Identify a shared problem worth solving — a workforce gap, a social-licence risk, an unmet community need.

2. **Find the partners who share your values.** Approach the partners whose values align with yours; make your own values explicit and visible, the right partners will self-select.

3. **Start with a conversation, not a contract.** Talk to the community or beneficiary first — ask what they need and what would make things better — before designing a solution. Be prepared not to have the answers upfront

4. **Agree, together, what success looks like.** Define measures of success for all participants up front, include economic and cultural community measures, and keep them realistic.

5. **Choose a model that fits, or a blend of models**. Don't rely on donations; ensure funding is adequately budgeted.

6. **Design for self-sufficiency from day one.** Build an underlying business, employment model or ownership structure, not a donation pipeline, so the work survives once initial funding ends.

7. **Start small, prove it, then scale.** Pilot the approach, demonstrate the win–win–win, and use the evidence to bring more of the value chain in.

8. **Measure it and tell the story.** Capture impact and share it through your everyday business touchpoints; doing so builds staff engagement, customer loyalty and the next partnership.

Figure 18: Fish drying in Negombo, Sri Lanka (Source: Author, December 2025).

Starting the conversation

The prompts below are conversation starters a reader can take directly to a supplier, a customer, or a community, drawn from the success factors in Section 4:

- Who in our value chain shares our values — and would they say the same of us?
- What is one problem we both care about that neither of us can solve alone?
- What would success look like — to you, to us, and to the community?
- What could each of us realistically contribute: money, expertise, market access, people, or product?
- If procurement cannot carry this cost, where else in our businesses could it sit?

Figure 19: GFP3 group visiting aquaculture in rural Zimbabwe (Source: Author, June 2025).

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