What we've heard over the course of engagement for the social cohesion programme

Introduction

Following on from the recommendations of *Royal Commission of Inquiry report into the terrorist attack on Christchurch masjidain on 15 March 2019*, (RCOI) the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) engaged with people in Aotearoa New Zealander about the development of a social cohesion strategic framework, measurement framework and ways for communities, the business sector, the cultural sector, and central and local government to contribute to social cohesion. The key themes of what MSD heard are presented in this report. The engagement process had five phases, Engagement spanned from July 2021 to March 2022:

Phase one (June-August 2021)
Joint engagement with Ministry of Justice and Department of Internal Affairs, 30 hui across Aotearoa/New Zealand. Subsequent discussion document received 341 submissions which were then analysed.

Phase two (September to December 2021)
Feedback deadline extended to 31 October, 2021. Key groups under-represented in phase one identified and contacted.

Phase three (November 2021 to March 2022)
Key stakeholders from diverse communities helped develop social cohesion materials at five wananga.

Phase four (March 2022 to April 2022)
Stakeholders consulted on materials, 76 written submissions received. Online hui held.

Phase five (August 2021 to March 2022)

Targeted engagement with Māori.

Note: MSD did engage youth 16 years and over but did not engage any children 15 years and under. There may also have been submissions from groups that included young people.

What we've heard

Aotearoa New Zealand has a problem with social cohesion

All stakeholders and key groups described that for many New Zealanders, Aotearoa New Zealand can be a difficult place to live and an even more difficult place to thrive. Negative experiences have a long history in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many submitters described that the framework must acknowledge the

past to move forward. As summed up by this submitter: '*Social cohesion cannot be successful if historical amnesia is maintained.* Experiences included:

- hatred, racism, bigotry and micro aggressions are a daily experience
- Māori and Pacific Peoples have unequal access to services
- those who live rurally are at risk of isolation
- people of faith described issues such as islamophobia, and how the practice of faiths can create cohesion or exclusion
- LGBTTQIA+ people experience rejection from their families and communities
- government agencies treat people differently and are often unsafe or unwelcoming.

Intersectionality and negative experiences often compound

People described how the diversity described above interconnects. People and society are not a '*melting pot'* or '*homogenised*' but instead are better viewed as a '*mosaic*'. People have multiple parts to their identity and these different parts underpin the true beauty of a person and society. People did not want to choose one part of their identity and bury others.

Of course, sometimes individual characteristics can create compounding challenges. When these different parts combine, it can be challenging for people and organisations to respond to the diversity seen within a person or group of people. For example a migrant, a person. of colour, within the LGBTQIA+ community but also attempting to hold onto his/her/their faith

Participants also described how migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand experience very different welcomes and job prospects, etc. Migrants with white skin who speak English are '*treated like New Zealanders from day one*', whereas '*First generation kiwis of Pacific descent still feel like migrants'*, even after a generation.

Participants often described how Government agencies and services did not notice or understand how these nuances in a person's identity could lead to multiple strengths/disadvantages and recounted many examples of where appropriate support was not forthcoming. People described many situations where they felt they were '*fractured or boxed in*' or '*homogenised*' by services, schools, communities, businesses etc.

Placing Te Tiriti o Waitangi within the framework

Participants described Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation document of Aotearoa New Zealand. Communities and stakeholders wanted Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Te Ao Māori at the centre of the social cohesion framework and for the framework to recognise Māori in their role as tāngata whenua. This was also the desire of Associate Minister Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan.

Throughout the engagement, participants queried how Te Tiriti o Waitangi was embedded within the framework, beyond just 'saying it'. Some participants and stakeholders wished to see a Te Ao Māori centred process, which they described would likely have produced a radically different framework. Participants and

stakeholders also queried the level of participation by Māori in the development of the framework, wanting to see greater engagement on top of what had occurred.

Lack of resources

Resourcing was a dominant barrier listed by nearly all submitters. across all phases of engagement. Its prominence in the framework was requested to be strengthened, both as a barrier, potential enabler, within Tangible Government Actions, and within the measurement framework.

Flexibility of funding was mentioned many times, with smaller/grassroots organisations having skills and reach into marginalised communities, but often without the structure or track record required to access funding.

A definition and vision for social cohesion

The RCOI definition described social cohesion as a sense of belonging, participation, recognition, legitimacy and inclusion. The report noted that social cohesion exists where people feel part of society, family and personal relationships are strong, differences among people are respected, and people feel safe and supported by others.

From the beginning of the engagement, the RCOI definition resonated somewhat, but most participants and submitters suggested change. '*Belonging*' however, was supported by nearly all. Belonging was less important for tangata whenua as '*that just is*', but '*respect*' was sought. Across other participants, '*respect*' was a term frequently heard rather than '*recognition*'. To thrive, people and communities saw the need for equity. For most participants and stakeholders, equity resonated more than the word '*inclusion.*'

One group of participants said social cohesion meant '*a community that looks out for each other and supports each other*' and '*getting along with people from all sorts of backgrounds and not just people like yourself.*' The participants also said social cohesion means '*not needing to assimilate to the dominant culture and being authentic to your identity without shame.*'

Building on the engagement findings and RCOI definition, the draft vision statement for the social cohesion framework was developed in the wānanga to become '*All people, whānau and communities thrive, belong and are respected in Aotearoa New Zealand.*'

How to achieve social cohesion

A literature scan undertaken by MSD provided initial concepts on how social cohesion might be achieved, with six key themes.

Table 1. The progression of 'ways to achieve social cohesion' throughout the engagement which later became "Focus areas for action"

Six key themes to achieve social cohesion from the literature scan	Six key themes in the final draft
1. Fostering common values and inclusive social norms.	1. Fostering inclusive social norms that unite us and value diverse contributions.
2. Encouraging and facilitating positive interactions between people.	2. Encouraging and facilitating positive interactions within and across diverse groups.
3. Tackling harms to inclusion, including prejudice, discrimination, and other harmful behaviours.	3. Tackling all forms of discrimination
4. Supporting people to have the knowledge and skills they need to participate.	4. Supporting and facilitating participation
5. Supporting people to have a voice and feel heard.	
6. Reducing inequality and improving opportunities for people by providing support and resources.	5. Ensuring equitable access to the determinants of wellbeing for all.
	6. Protecting our society and environment for future generations.

Participants generally did not want to prioritise the six *ways* and felt that giving equal weight might lead to a more holistic approach. Having said that, many described that '*Reducing inequality…/ Ensuring equitable access…*' was the most important *way* to progress social cohesion.

Participants noted the challenge to this approach was that those with privilege need to receive somewhat less to provide to those without. Such actions usually only occur when there is transfer of power or decision-making to traditionally marginalised people.

The second-most commented way was '*Tackling harms to inclusion…/Tackling all forms of discrimination…*' Many people commented on the negative impacts they had personally experienced arising from prejudice and discrimination

The *way* which generated the most concerns was '*Fostering common values…/Fostering inclusive social norms…*' because there was an inherent conflict with celebrating diversity. People did not believe that Aotearoa New Zealand's '*norms*' and/or '*values*' were understood, and wanted to know who set these and how? This *way* was often supported by those who felt there should be a collective Aotearoa New Zealand identity, and that should not be threatened by people who come to Aotearoa New Zealand. Many participants also described that a basic tenant of social cohesion was '*equal rights and free speech protection*', though some participants felt it critical to match rights with responsibilities.

Related to this *way*, several submitters wanted the framework to explicitly acknowledge and address those who are working against social cohesion. Within enablers/barriers, submitters expanded on this idea by wishing to see concepts of '*common good*', '*shared purpose*', '*social solidarity*', '*the organised efforts of society*' etc. highlighted and expanded upon, alongside explicitly mentioning the negative aspects of individualism.

The *way* '*Supporting people to participate and influence change*' was endorsed throughout the engagement. People were direct in their challenge, that Government had a lot of work to do to engage communities in a meaningful way, building partnerships based on trust rather than undertaking one-off, siloed and tick-box '*consultation.*' Participants also challenged the low level of influence that communities felt in influencing decisions and lack of accountability in Government agencies and services.

Many Government agencies, services and businesses were said to lack diversity in their staff and not reflect the communities they represent or serve. This was a common statement across engagement from all types of participants and submitters including people with disabilities, Māori, Pasifika, Asian, people of faith, people of colour, migrants, LGBTQI+, rural, older, younger, etc.

For the way, '*Encouraging and facilitating positive interactions across diverse groups*' there was a lot of support, and ideas to further promote such work. One such concept was the need to not only consider diversity within types of people, but between age groups as well. Children, young people, middle aged and older people were all described as having a strong role in promoting social cohesion between diverse groups and across ages.

One topic united all submitters and participants - media, social media and the web were seen as a distinct barrier to social cohesion, and these topics were asked to be explicitly included within the framework as a barrier and elsewhere. Participants and submitters described the negative aspects of the internet and social media platforms for generating mistrust, spreading disinformation, promoting individualism over democratic institutions, bullying and inciting hatred. Throughout the engagement, people described how the media seldom portrayed certain groupings of people, and if they did, often played to stereotypes or portrayed people negatively, e.g., older people, people with disabilities, migrants. The positive aspects of the media (and arts) on building social cohesion were also well described, showing how a nuanced and thoughtful approach to media was required. The arts were often described as an enabler of social cohesion.

Tangible Government Actions

In September 2019, Cabinet agreed to some evidence-based actions to improve social Inclusion Additional actions were agreed by Cabinet in June 2020. Phases three and four led to the tangible government actions becoming broader, more holistic and strategic:

- Transforming the education system and curriculum
- Transforming Government structures, systems and processes
- Empowering and supporting young people and children
- Empowering and enabling communities
- Recognising Māori and Tino Rangatiratanga
- An inclusive immigration policy
- Environmental sustainability
- Addressing welfare issues and inequities
- Improving the health and wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Submitters expressed some frustration about the actions and wished to have greater clarity about who led the framework, and where responsibilities lay for driving the work about enablers, removing barriers, taking the Tangible Government Actions forward and collecting, analysing and reporting on measurement.

The measurement framework

Phases one and two of engagement presented a '*blank sheet*' for the measurement framework and instead asked '*What would success look like?*' The analysis of responses from hui and submissions helped MSD understand what outcomes needed to be measured. They were:

1. People, whānau and communities:
   - Feel like they belong
   - Respect and embrace diversity
   - Are connected to their communities and others
   - Are able to disagree in a respectful and safe way
   - Have equitable wellbeing outcomes
   - Are supported and have the capacity to participate.

2. The places that we live, work, play and learn:
   - Are inclusive, accessible and appropriate for all
   - Are healthy, safe and high quality
   - Are supportive, welcoming and representative.

3. Institutions, systems and all sectors:
   - Are actively inclusive and supportive
   - Are accountable, and transparent
   - Are anti-discriminatory
   - Are supportive
   - Are trusted by all.

Submitters commented that they wished to see a more comprehensive and bespoke approach to data collection, analysis and reporting. Submitters were concerned that the examples used to measure outcomes were indicative only.

Phase four submitters were also concerned about the lack of connection between the enablers, barriers and Tangible Government Actions; and the measurement framework

Conclusion

While the engagement taken was thorough and diverse, submitters and participants challenged Government to continue to improve throughout the engagement – to reach a greater diversity of voices. What is clear however, is that the framework has substantially evolved throughout the engagement process.