

TATOU TATOU – WORKING TOGETHER: A MODEL FOR GOVERNMENT / NON-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

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Abstract

“Te Rito”, the Government’s strategy for preventing, reducing and addressing family violence, was launched in March 2002. Te Rito was developed by a large group of government and non-government agencies working together in partnership. The collaborative working relationship that was established from the outset was key to the strategy’s successful development. This article describes the development process that underpinned Te Rito, discusses some of the associated challenges and constraints from both a government and non-government perspective, and demonstrates innovative ways of meeting some of these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Family violence is a significant social issue in Aotearoa/New Zealand, one that concerns communities and government alike. Because of the extent of this problem, in June 2000 the then Ministry of Social Policy (now Ministry of Social Development)¹ undertook a review of family violence prevention in New Zealand to inform policy directions, future funding and delivery of services.

While government has a responsibility to ensure that all people in this country remain safe and free from violence, much of the preventive, supportive and therapeutic work associated with family violence is provided by the non-government/community sector. Cognisant of this fact, the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) sought to involve community agencies in the review in a way that genuinely valued the knowledge, expertise and experience that communities have to offer.

¹ The change occurred on 1 October 2001. For convenience we will refer to the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) only in the remainder of this paper.

Two positive outcomes were achieved through involving non-government/community representatives in the review of family violence prevention. First is the development of Te Rito, an agreed cross-sector family violence prevention strategy. Te Rito takes a broad, multi-faceted approach to family violence prevention, is vision-based, strongly reflects community input, and has identified and built on past and existing initiatives. It also sets out the Government's key goals and objectives, a set of guiding principles, and a five-year implementation plan for maximising progress toward the strategy's vision of "Families/whānau living free from violence".

Second, a strong collaborative working relationship has been established between government and non-government organisations (NGOs). The intention is to continue to build on this relationship through the next phase. This is vital to ensuring that the strategy's vision, goals, objectives and areas of action are successfully implemented.

MSD has also been engaged in a major work programme aimed at building strong and respectful working relationships between government and communities. The Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party, chaired by Dorothy Wilson, published a report *Communities and Government – Potential for Partnership, Whakatoopu Whakaaro* (2001a). This report reflected on a range of issues including the strong sense of exclusion from key information that iwi and community organisations experience and their belief that officials lack understanding of the iwi and community sector.

In response to this report, in 2001 MSD published a *Statement of Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship*. The Government intends to break down the "silos" government agencies operate in and improve the way agencies engage communities in policy and decision making. The aim is to ensure that the knowledge, wisdom and practical experience of the community sector contributes fully to policy decisions.

While the family violence prevention strategy was to a large extent developed concurrently with the Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party project, it demonstrates a style of working that is wholly consistent with the key directions of the *Statement of Intentions*.

In this paper we:

- describe the process used for developing Te Rito, the New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy;
- discuss some of the challenges and constraints of working collaboratively; and
- demonstrate ways in which these challenges were met.

PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

By 2000 number of years had past since the publication of the *New Zealand Government Statement of Policy on Family Violence* (Department of Social Welfare 1996), the development of the Family Violence Crime Prevention Package and the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act 1995. In light of this and the Government's commitment to a number of international conventions specifically related to intra-familial violence² and to addressing all forms and degrees of violence, the Government considered it timely to review current approaches to family violence prevention and to identify future action.

In September 2000 the Minister of Social Services and Employment, Steve Maharey, directed MSD to develop a "plan for future action" that identified short-term and medium-term priorities, including resource implications for current and future family violence prevention initiatives. MSD's initial task was to identify the key agencies that would need to be involved in the review and to develop an agreed project plan. Fortunately, there were two key family violence groups already established that could assist with this task.

The first of these groups was the Family Violence Focus Group (FVFG). FVFG was established in 1994 by the Crime Prevention Unit as a mechanism to develop and recommend strategies to reduce the incidence of family violence.³ At that time membership was restricted to a small group of government agencies, but it has subsequently been extended to include NGOs. Its membership now consists of a wide range of government and non-government organisations operating at a national level.⁴ Members of FVFG act as a conduit for information-sharing between the national and community levels.

The second group was the Family Violence Advisory Committee (FVAC). FVAC was established in 1994 by the Minister of Social Welfare under section 30 of the Social Welfare Transitional Provisions Act 1990, to provide confidential expert advice to the Minister on family violence.⁵ Members were appointed by the relevant Minister on the

² For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ As set out in the terms of reference for the Family Violence Focus Group.

⁴ Group membership comprises: the National Network of Stopping Violence Services; National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges; National Collective of Rape Crisis and Related Groups; Royal New Zealand Plunket Society; Barnardos; Age Concern New Zealand; Relationship Services; Child Abuse Prevention Services New Zealand; Pacific Island Women's Project; the Ministries of Social Development, Health, Pacific Island Affairs, Women's Affairs, Justice (including the Crime Prevention Unit), and Education (including Specialist Education Services); the Departments of Child, Youth, and Family Services, Corrections, Internal Affairs (including Ethnic Affairs); the Department for Courts; New Zealand Police; Early Childhood Development; Te Puni Kōkiri; Treasury; and the Accident Compensation Corporation.

⁵ As set out in the terms of reference for the Family Violence Advisory Committee.

basis of their knowledge and expertise in the family violence prevention area, and their practical experience in the community.

MSD invited all members of these groups to participate in developing the project plan for the review. A core team, representing FVFG and FVAC, was formed to produce the first draft. Once developed, it was distributed for wider consultation to all members of FVFG and FVAC. The project plan set the scope and potential areas of focus for the review and identified the key tasks to be undertaken. The NGOs, in particular, advocated a fully comprehensive approach to the review that took into account all forms of family violence (partner abuse, child abuse/neglect, elder abuse/neglect, parental abuse and sibling abuse), and the linkages between these.

The Minister of Social Services and Employment subsequently approved the project plan in September 2000. Although the plan provided some focus and guidance on how the review should be undertaken, further work was required to establish clear parameters and direction for the review. MSD organised a full-day workshop with all members of FVFG and FVAC for this purpose. While the workshop reinforced the need to understand and tackle family violence prevention in its broadest sense, specific issues, gaps in services and priority areas were also identified. Most significantly, however, a large group of government and non-government organisations reached agreement on a common vision and a set of inter-related principles to guide the development process.

The next phase was to gather information from a diverse range of sources to identify further issues and gaps, strategies to address these, and priorities for action. Information sources included:

- an extensive literature review of national and international research;
- a stocktake of existing family violence prevention initiatives and services in New Zealand;
- four community workshops held in Porirua, Whanganui, Christchurch and Thames/Hauraki;⁶
- interviews with key informants; and
- written submissions.

The aim of the community workshops was to bring together people working in the family violence area at a community level – to discuss what was happening, what worked well and what did not, and to get insight into the specific issues communities faced in addressing family violence (Caton 2001). A further aim was to establish whether common themes could be identified across all communities. As such, the

⁶ Community workshops were held between 20 February and 1 March 2001.

workshops were aimed at gathering the best information possible from communities to “inform” the development of policy, rather than consulting on an established one.

Because of the resource and time constraints, only four communities were selected for conducting focused workshops. The selection attempted to ensure that a wide range of ethnic populations, higher and lower socio-economic groups, and urban, rural and provincial districts were covered (Caton 2001). Priority was also given to communities where information on family violence prevention approaches was relatively limited.

Using FVFG contacts, a wide range of government agencies, key sector groups and service providers within each community were invited to attend the workshops⁷ (Caton 2001). FVFG/FVAC members also attended each forum.

Full-day workshops, organised by MSD and facilitated by an independent contractor, were held in each of the communities. The appropriate protocol for beginning and ending the workshop sessions was determined in consultation with each community. This was extremely important given the diverse make-up of the community groups, and the need to acknowledge and respect local dynamics and preferences.

Although workshops were structured into four focus group sessions, sufficient flexibility was also built into the process. The morning sessions focused specifically on identifying key issues/gaps and what was working well in the community. The afternoon sessions were solution-orientated and focused on specific topics of interest.⁸ Small groups (six to eight people) had a set time to discuss and record responses. Focus questions and prompts were provided to each group. While groups were assisted with the task, they were largely self-facilitating and self-recording (Caton 2001).

At the completion of all the workshops, responses were analysed by the independent contractor. A draft report was produced and provided to MSD on the outcomes of the workshops. MSD ensured that the draft report was distributed to all workshop participants for their information and/or comment. Regardless of diversity, a range of common themes cut across all the communities. In addition, there was a strong congruence between the vision and principles identified by the FVFG/FVAC workshop and the key recommendations from the four community workshops.

Because limited resources restricted wider involvement from other communities, key informants were identified and interviews conducted by MSD to complement the

⁷ Numbers attending ranged from 30 to 80 people.

⁸ Specific topics of interest were predominantly ‘sector’ and ‘population’ focussed. For example, “the potential role of the education sector in preventing family violence” and “preventing family violence in Māori communities”.

information gathered from the community workshops. Interviewees mainly represented major family violence prevention networks and projects, and specific population groups. The diverse and significant demographic profile of the northern region led to a number of interviews being conducted in that area. Written submissions were also received by MSD from various interest groups throughout the country.

During the process, requests were often made from specific groups to be updated on progress. On request, organised feedback sessions were conducted by MSD. In addition, MSD ensured that the FVFG and FVAC were regularly updated on progress.

At the end of the information-gathering phase, a core team, representing the FVFG and FVAC, analysed and reconciled the information that was gathered and established a vision, key goals and objectives, and a preliminary plan of action. A further full-day workshop was conducted with all members from FVFG and FVAC to discuss the draft plan of action and agree to its framework. Agreement on the overall direction of the plan was achieved.

As a result, in September 2001 a cross-sector plan of action was released. The Government then tasked the FVFG to use the plan of action to develop a five-year implementation strategy for the Government to consider. The Government has since considered and endorsed Te Rito as its family violence prevention strategy. Te Rito was officially launched in March 2002.

CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES TO COLLABORATION – ISSUES AFFECTING GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Government agencies often face a number of constraints and challenges that when they seek to involve communities in a meaningful way in the development of major social policy initiatives. These include:

- resource, time and practical constraints;
- political dynamics;
- overcoming a history of distrust;
- identifying when and how to involve communities in policy development; and
- reconciling diverse perspectives.

Resource, Time and Practical Constraints

While government agencies are better resourced than NGOs, work programmes and timeframes for delivering individual projects are often unrealistic, complex, demand-driven and resource- and time-intensive. Also, officials are often responsible for managing multiple projects at one time. These factors can significantly affect the time

and resources invested for ensuring a good process, and may influence the nature and extent of community input.

The review of family violence prevention was under considerable time and resource constraints. Despite this, deadlines were met, considerable community input was obtained, and a high-quality cross-sector strategy produced. The end product could not have been achieved without the full involvement of the NGOs throughout the process. Sharing the workload and decision-making with a range of government and non-government agencies helped to ensure deadlines were met and resources were used as efficiently as possible. These agencies also acted as a conduit for information flow between national and community levels.

A variety of information-gathering techniques were employed to facilitate further input from communities. Given the practical difficulties associated with bringing the full FVFG/FVAC groups together at regular intervals, the formation of a representative sub-group ensured that the project kept on track and continued to accommodate and reflect a broad range of community interests and perspectives. The sub-group was also responsible for making key decisions at various stages of the process and for ensuring that the members of FVFG/FVAC (whom they represented) were fully consulted and had input into the decision-making process. The formation of the sub-group proved most effective when deadlines were approaching fast, decisions needed to be made promptly, and details associated with the content of the strategy needed to be worked through relatively quickly.

Political Dynamics

Officials are first and foremost public servants and are responsible for providing the best advice possible to their respective Ministers when decisions on particular issues need to be made at the governance level. There are a number of political sensitivities and requirements around decision-making at this level and papers to government must generally be treated with the strictest confidence. Consequently, at certain stages of the process this can limit an official's ability to fully communicate or circulate particular papers to NGOs.

The policy development process is relatively lengthy, and once decisions are made by government it takes time to work through the operational details required for implementation. There can be a lengthy time lag before a policy is finally implemented. This can cause considerable frustration for NGOs/communities, whose needs require immediate action.

Further, when developing policy papers for government consideration, officials are required to respond to a number of set process criteria. For example, they must

consider a range of departmental views, the impact the policy may have on specific population groups, the short-term and long-term benefits and risks of the policy, and how identified risks are to be managed. In some cases departmental views may conflict on a particular policy position. This can add time to an already lengthy process and may result in significant compromises. NGOs/communities are often unaware of the conflicts that may occur at the governance level and the difficulties associated with reconciling these, and can therefore be disappointed with the final outcome.

These political dynamics were communicated to NGOs/communities at the relevant stages of the review. Therefore, when advice to government was being prepared, NGOs were aware that they would not be part of the consultation process at that stage. However, because NGOs played a major role in the review, their input was strongly reflected in the content of these papers. Once decisions were made by government, these were communicated to NGOs immediately.

In addition, a range of government agencies were actively involved in the review, so any differences that arose were resolved prior to preparing advice to government. Consequently, there were no surprises at the content of the papers. This enabled the advice to progress through the approval process relatively quickly. Also, preparations for implementation were occurring before the strategy's release and a number of actions will be implemented by the end of this year.

Overcoming a History of Distrust

Due to a number of factors, relationships between government and communities have been strained, and a history of community distrust in government has evolved. Factors that have impeded the formation of strong, collaborative relationships between government and non-government agencies include:

- conservative government views on the extent to which communities should be involved in policy development;
- consultation with communities often occurs on an already established position, rather than to inform the development process;
- community input may not be reflected in the final product;
- expectations are often raised and not delivered on;
- feedback to communities on the outcomes of the consultation does not always occur; and
- officials may feel apprehensive about consulting communities as they are often held accountable for broader departmental issues over which they have little or no influence.

Identifying When and How to Involve Communities

These factors are related to the fourth constraint/challenge: knowing whom to consult, and when and how to involve communities in policy development. The review met these constraints/challenges by:

- involving NGOs at the outset of the process to determine the direction and scope of the review;
- taking an inclusive and collaborative approach and continuing to actively involve NGOs at each stage of the policy development process;
- establishing an honest and transparent process where constraints and potential conflicts of interests were identified and communicated to each other so that NGOs/communities were clear on the extent to which they could be involved at all stages of the review;
- sharing the workload, network contacts and decision-making;
- providing regular updates on progress;
- involving communities in the formation of policy rather than consulting on an already established position;
- taking into account diverse community dynamics and preferences;
- focusing community input so that the information gathered would substantially influence the final outcome; and
- ensuring that everyone who participated in the process of developing the strategy felt valued and was provided with feedback on how their information was used.

Reconciling Diverse Perspectives

The final challenge was to bring together and reconcile the diverse perspectives gained from the information-gathering process. Although common themes were identified, priorities for focus and intervention differed. In addition, government priorities and the political context also needed to be factored into the final recommendations.

Given the differences in agency priorities and focus, the review sought to establish agreement, in the first instance, to a common vision, principles on process and high-level goals and objectives. Once agreement was established on these, details for how the goals and objectives could be achieved were worked through with patience and a willingness to compromise.

Ultimately, the review attempted to ensure that the essence of community input was strongly reflected in the family violence prevention strategy. The strategy has taken a broad and multi-faceted approach to preventing, reducing and addressing family violence and has benefited greatly from extensive community input and involvement.

ISSUES AFFECTING NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

NGOs provide some or all of the following aspects of family violence prevention:

- preventive, crisis and therapeutic services;
- co-ordination of and support for member agencies; and/or
- advocacy.

They are involved to varying degrees in all aspects of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. Most, if not all, see themselves as under-resourced for the tasks they wish to do. All have a passionate belief that family violence is extraordinarily damaging to individuals, families and the wider society and are committed to its prevention. Their motivations to be involved in developing family violence prevention policy include a desire to see more resources directed towards addressing a major social problem in New Zealand and a belief that the practical knowledge and experience they have is not always acknowledged or valued by the officials making policy.

However, organisations and individuals within the NGO sector vary in the emphasis they place on aspects of the dynamics and causes of family violence. In addition, there is not always agreement about priorities for intervention or the value of different interventions. Service providers usually feel intensely loyal to the sector of society whose interest they promote and may find it difficult to stand outside their particular focus and take an overview of needs and approaches. Even within a particular arena, such as family violence, there are specialists whose knowledge in their specialty is extensive but not general. The same constraints may apply to geographic issues, with individuals and agencies being limited in their awareness of the needs of the nation as a whole. Therefore two of the challenges facing the NGO sector as they respond to a collaborative approach are how to:

- ensure adequate representation (of both location and focus); and
- promote understanding and agreement between the various interest groups within it.

These differences were apparent at many of the meetings associated with the review, but generally issues were resolved with patience, openness and a willingness to compromise.

Consultation is a central issue in any collaborative process. While there are processes that in theory allow for all individuals and agencies to give their point of view (by submission, for example) there are often limitations to these approaches. Any process that involves face-to-face consultation on an ongoing basis during the development of a policy will be constrained by time and resources. Efficiency requires that working parties and reference groups be limited in size. When a project is led from a specific locality (Wellington being the most common site) there may be limitations on who can

be involved, with local people usually called upon. While ideally such staff will then consult with their colleagues around New Zealand, tensions may still arise with various groups and individuals not feeling adequately involved or adequately represented by a parent body or someone based in Wellington (for example). With the review, considerable effort was made to facilitate wide participation involving a range of consultative approaches. Despite this, not everyone in the NGO sector felt sufficiently included, heard or represented.

The timing of consultation with the NGO sector is critical. Too often the work of government is almost completed before the NGO sector is consulted. In the case of this review, the NGO sector was involved from the beginning.

Consultation can take a number of approaches. The classic government consultation document – widely available but often lengthy – cannot always be said to be user-friendly. Anyone who has analysed responses to such a document knows the frustrations with trying to identify themes from responses. Techniques that focus responses (such as specific questions) help, but do not address the needs of those who do not have time to read lengthy documents or whose preferred mode of communication is person to person. Consultation groups and the like are more acceptable to many but require expert facilitation if they are to provide participants with sufficient information to focus responses. The review employed a variety of consultation techniques, but also relied to a large extent on core groups to represent organisations.

“Analysis” is the core business of officials. The skills of analysis include the ability to access and understand a range of information quickly and to identify key themes, issues, solutions and approaches. The solutions and approaches officials identify must also take into account government’s interests and priorities. These techniques and constraints are foreign and sometimes little understood by some service providers whose day-to-day work involves keeping an organisation afloat and delivering services to clients. It is not surprising then that one of the challenges in collaborative policy work is understanding the constraints that each sector faces. Finding a constructive middle ground will require officials to communicate their constraints, invite constructive contribution within these and use their analytic abilities to pull together and give feedback on the raw material they are given. In the case of the review, a great deal of hard work went into compiling the views of people who attended the community workshops and identifying themes. In addition, government constraints were communicated to participants at the outset of each community workshop.

While NGOs understand the value of analysis and some may employ staff with relevant skills, they are constrained by their need to balance priorities. Skill capacity

can also be an issue, and there is a need for funders to take this into account if the community sector is to be strengthened and valued.

The NGO sector has given generously of its time in the development of the family violence prevention strategy. This has inevitably been at the expense of other work, or compensated for by NGO people making up their other work in their own time. There is no fat in output-funded systems. The willingness of the NGO sector to give its time freely to the review of family violence prevention represents the strength of their feeling about the need to do more to address family violence. It also reflects their appreciation for the inclusive process involved. However, there is a need for Government to have a transparent formula for how to compensate NGO involvement. Attendance at some advisory groups is well funded, while attendance at others is not funded at all.

The process of collaboration is not helped by the cynicism and distrust that presently exists within the NGO sector. There has been a long history of limited consultation, feeling unheard, limited resources, and strategies that have not been implemented. These issues will only be addressed by change. The family violence prevention strategy will be a test case. Consultation has been sincere and the process has been inclusive. A mechanism to ensure implementation is being established and NGOs have been involved in determining the structure this will take.

Many of the issues discussed above reflect themes identified by the Community and Voluntary Sector Working Party as barriers to improving relationships. The review of family violence prevention has been a successful collaborative one and emphasises the need to be mindful of the challenges and constraints, and innovative in finding ways to address these.

CONCLUSION

Good social policy must be based on the best information available at the time, and a key measure of its success is its ability to be fully implemented and to make a positive difference, in the long term, to the general well-being of the nation. There is a wealth of knowledge in communities that can contribute significantly to the policy development process. Consequently, good social outcomes will be dependent, in part, on ensuring good process.

As described in this article, there are a number of constraints and challenges to undertaking a collaborative approach. While these constraints can act as real barriers to a truly collaborative process, this does not excuse government officials from exploring ways in which to overcome these. The review of family violence prevention

is an example of how important it is to work collaboratively, and illustrates that it is possible to find solutions to overcoming barriers together.

Despite the challenges involved in working collaboratively with a wide range of agencies and organisations with differing priorities, differing ways of understanding issues and a history of lack of faith in each other, much was achieved by using a sincerely collaborative approach in the social policy work underpinning the family violence prevention strategy. It cannot be said that the strategy fully meets the wishes of the NGO/community sector, because the tension between needs and constraint are constant. However, the content of the strategy has benefited hugely from the wide knowledge of the NGO/community sector. The strategy development process has also ensured further NGO involvement in implementing the strategy and monitoring implementation.

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