

# Implementing a social development approach

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## Introduction

In October 2001 the Ministry of Social Development was set up to lead a ‘social development approach across government’.

We were conscious that there was no clear script or neat roadmap available on how to implement a social development approach.

We were also conscious that social development was not just something for the Ministry of Social Development. It is an approach that seeks to make more effective use of all the levers of government in a coherent way to improve the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

This paper discusses the concept of social development and outlines a series of measures that will provide a foundation for a social development activities on an ongoing basis.

## Progressing Social Development in New Zealand

Social development is a process of co-ordinated social change that promotes the wellbeing of the population as a whole and of disadvantaged groups within it. It aims to improve health, education, housing, employment, living standards and safety, and focuses on outcomes to bring about change.

To be sustainable, social development and economic development must complement each other. They must also contribute to sustaining our cultural development and our environment.

Social development takes a “whole of life, whole-of-government” approach to improving the social wellbeing of New Zealanders. Whole-of-life means being aware that people have different needs at different stages of their life. Whole-of-government means working with other social sector agencies to get better outcomes for New Zealanders

Since 2001 we have put in place a series of measures which together provide the foundations for a social development approach in New Zealand. The most prominent of these are:

- The establishment of the Ministry of Social Development in 2001 to lead social development across the social sector
- The production of an annual Social Report on the well-being outcomes of New Zealanders
- The production of Opportunity for All New Zealanders – a summary of government strategies to improve well-being

- Cabinet agreement to the introduction of a Social Reporting Bill
- Structures and processes to lead social development at regional and local levels.

## **Establishing the Ministry of Social Development**

The Ministry of Social Development was formed in October 2001 through a merger of the Ministry of Social Policy and the Department of Work and Income New Zealand (the agency responsible for the delivery of social assistance and employment services). The Ministry was established to lead the implementation of a social development approach. The new Ministry's annual planning document noted :

The challenge is to move from social welfare to social development. This means developing social policy to enhance social and individual investment, and better link social development to economic development. The social development approach aims to produce opportunities for all New Zealanders to participate in the mainstream of our society. Under this model social policy and programmes are one of the key drivers for social and economic transformation.

The Strategic Social Policy Group, within the new department, was set up with a mandate to consider policies that cross the social sector (health, education, employment, justice, housing, social assistance, care and protection of children). It has been instrumental in developing a number of the high-level tools that underpin the social development approach.

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## **The Social Report**

Given an interest in improving wellbeing outcomes and in developing cross-sectoral strategies it was necessary to have a clear picture of what is actually happening to social outcomes in New Zealand.

*The Social Report* was first published in 2001. It provides a basis for annual reporting on the social health of New Zealand.

*The Social Report* is structured on the basis of 10 outcome domains – these are the key elements that New Zealanders have identified as necessary for their social wellbeing.

The set of domains highlights the importance of considering social outcomes in a holistic way.

*The Social Report* allows us to know how we are doing. It highlights trends, and shows how New Zealand is doing in relation to other OECD countries. It also describes the distribution of wellbeing across different groups in the population. It helps us identify priorities for policy attention. In 2005, *The Social Report* will be further developed to provide a picture of social wellbeing, wherever data allows it, at regional and local authority levels.

## **Opportunity for All New Zealanders**

Opportunity for All New Zealanders was launched in December 2004.

As the Government's co-ordinating framework for sustainable social development, *Opportunity for All New Zealanders* responds to social conditions reflected in *The Social Report* and summarises the Government's broad approach to social development. It describes what the Government is doing to improve social outcomes across the 10 domains of wellbeing contained in *The Social Report*.

*Opportunity for All New Zealanders* also identifies five priorities for inter-agency action over the next 3-5 years. These are:

- Improving educational achievement among low socio-economic groups (lead agency - Ministry of Education)
- Increasing opportunities for people to participate in sustainable employment (joint lead agencies - Department of Labour and Ministry of Social Development)
- Promoting healthy eating and healthy activity (lead agency - Ministry of Health)
- Reducing tobacco, alcohol and other drug abuse (lead agency - Ministry of Health)
- Minimising family violence, and abuse and neglect of children and older persons (lead agency - Ministry of Social Development).

*Opportunity for All New Zealanders* will promote a more strategic approach to inter-agency working. A committee chaired by the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development, and involving the Chief Executives of the Ministries of Health, Education and Justice will meet regularly to assess changes in New Zealand's social environment, identify emerging social issues, and provide collective advice to Ministers.

## **A Social Reporting Bill**

In July of this year, the Minister for Social Development and Employment will introduce a *Social Responsibility Bill*. This is a very interesting new development. We are not aware of anything similar in other jurisdictions.

The Bill will "lock in", through legislation, a requirement for regular reporting on social outcomes (*The Social Report*) and on government social strategies to improve the wellbeing of New Zealanders (*Opportunity for All New Zealanders*). It is proposed that responsibility for the social reporting requirement should rest with the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development who will carry out this function independently from ministers. On the other hand, the social strategies document will be a government document and will outline the Government's strategies to improve well-being. Responsibility for this document will rest with the Minister of Social Development and Employment.

The objective of the Bill is to improve stewardship of the social policy portfolio by providing for a more consistent and rigorous approach to social policy development over the long-term. In some respects the Bill could be seen as legislating for a social development approach.

It is not intended to pass the Bill before the end of the current Parliamentary session.

### **Regional and local social development**

Social development also needs to happen at the regional and local levels.

The Ministry has implemented a number of changes to facilitate social development leadership at the local level.

Regional Commissioners of Work and Income have taken on a regional social development leadership role. Social Development Managers and Regional Policy Analysts have been appointed to assist the Regional Commissioners in promoting more co-ordinated social development approaches at the local level. The regional policy capacity ensures that social policy and practice are informed by local knowledge and responsive to local circumstances.

In September 2004 we established *Family and Community Services* (FaCS) within the Ministry. FaCS is charged with leading and co-ordinating government and NGO services to families and communities. Early work has focused on the production of a *Families Programme of Action* for 2004/05 and the establishment of a national on-line directory of services, programmes and resources available to families. Local services mapping to identify the family, child and youth services currently available within localities will help FaCS to determine where the gaps are and to identify priorities for new or enhanced services. FaCS also has responsibility for the Heartlands Service Centres, which provide 'one-stop-shop' access to government services in remote and rural locations.

The Ministry has the largest, most comprehensive regional presence of any central government agency. Through our Work and Income service line we can influence individual income and employment outcomes. Through FaCS we have a capacity to influence outcomes at a family and community level. This provides us with a strong basis for promoting regional social development involving education, housing, justice and health providers.

We are also working closely with local authorities. The Local Government Amendment Act 2002 requires local authorities to determine social, cultural, economic and environmental objectives and to develop Long Term Council Community Plans (LTCCPs). The Ministry recognises the common interest in social development and is keen to support local authorities in delivering on their new roles. We are taking a lead role in co-ordinating central government's social sector input into LTCCP processes.

## **Continuing challenges for social development**

There is no clear script or neat roadmap available on how to implement a social development approach. Social development implies a long-term commitment to delivering sustainable improvements in well-being. The measures that we have put in place are still evolving and it will be some time before they reach their full potential. The approach needs to be able to adapt and refresh itself from time to time.

Further progress will rest on our capacity to direct social investment towards policies and services that will make the biggest difference to people's lives in the future. It will also be dependent on our ability to build capability to deliver evidence-based policy and practice and to deliver co-ordinated and coherent responses to complex social problems.

However, we are confident that a commitment to a social development approach will, over time, provide us with better ways to develop more effective social policy solutions to improve the wellbeing of all New Zealanders.