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SIA for rural resilience and wellbeing

***Edited by* Nick Taylor**

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Nick Taylor

The aim of *Impact Connector* is to provide a place where NZAIA members and impact assessment (IA) practitioners can write about current practice, case studies and IA research. We provide a platform for discussion of practice issues, rather than academic research and debates better published in journals such as *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*. Each *Impact Connector* issue has a topical theme: in this issue we explore the role of social impact assessment (SIA) in helping to build the resilience and wellbeing of rural areas and communities.

Papers in *Impact Connector* typically vary in length and here we have four longer papers that explore issues of rural change in some depth. These papers cover different aspects of rural change including agents of change driving environmental management by farmers, the characteristics of inhabited islands and remote communities that host projects such as predator eradications, rural housing deprivation, and the factors that drive success in rural regeneration projects. The papers include insights from social theory, SIA research and practical applications of SIA.

Why a rural focus? Driving the early development of SIA - in Aotearoa and internationally - was a focus on rural areas, where projects utilising natural resources also impacted rural people and communities. In these early days, there were two threads to the development of SIA in Aotearoa. First, there was a round of "think big" energy projects in places such as Huntly (coal-fired power station), Whangārei (oil and gas) and Taranaki (oil and gas). There were also places experiencing social impacts as projects wound down from construction started in the late 1960s and early 1970s: from the Waitaki and Clutha River/Mata-Au hydro projects, to Turangi in the north (Taylor and Mackay, 2016). Through these two threads, SIA cut its teeth and the NZSIA Working Group began – eventually to become NZAIA – with a broad focus on assessing the impacts of proposed projects, from initial project development phases, through to managing the impacts of construction and workforce winddowns (see the paper by Charles Crothers in *Impact Connector* # 14).

SIA practice has since expanded to consider a much broader range of issues as represented in the four papers in this issue. Current practice is commonly seen throughout the project cycle (Taylor and Mackay, 2024) and applied to policies, plans, and projects. Community-based approaches to SIA are evident, with greater focus on social development and wellbeing outcomes for people and communities. Furthermore, SIA research more commonly supports current practice, providing a stronger theoretical and empirical basis to assessments for particular cases.

In the first paper in this issue, **Nick Kirk** examines the process of change amongst farmers as they look to address environmental concerns arising from intensive agriculture. He identifies the importance of understanding different drivers of change by farmers as they seek to adopt more sustainable land uses and farming technologies. The typical drivers of on-farm change are agricultural advisors, extension agents and financial advisors, often working in a top-down mode. His paper suggests that the agents of change mediating responses by farmers are usually complex and interrelated. An understanding of these drivers is necessary to better assess the impacts of regulatory changes and realise the intended environmental outcomes of those regulations for farming, rural land uses, and water management.

Next, **Katherine Russell** and **colleagues** discuss strategic social-ecological assessment for planning projects and programmes located in inhabited islands, and in rural and remote areas of Aotearoa. These places host complex changes that have social-ecological impacts, requiring community participation in design and implementation of programmes such as predator eradications. Assessment teams usefully incorporate local knowledge and mātauranga with commitment to the co-production of knowledge. The paper provides a social-ecological framework to guide necessary assessments and support a community-based approach to SIA.

The third paper considers how the resilience and wellbeing of rural families and communities depends on adequate houses to provide a secure home with warmth, comfort, safety and protection from natural events. **Gillian Stewart** investigates the quality of housing in the Northland Region. She identifies that Northland has a high rate of people experiencing severe housing deprivation. In response, programmes such as those of the Māori Housing Network and Habitat for Humanity are identifying and documenting housing issues and developing options around community partnerships. The aim of such programmes is to increase wellbeing and resilience to future and intergenerational impacts, including climate events.

In the final paper, **Nick Taylor** and **Mike Mackay** summarise results from their SIA research on rural regeneration in the Waitaki area. SIA research is retrospective and informs SIAs applied to planning new initiatives. This research utilised qualitative data and action research to evaluate regeneration efforts that included heritage areas, a cycle trail, irrigated land uses, integration of migrant workers, and a housing strategy. The authors identify criteria for success in community-based regeneration, with application to project development, implementation, and evaluation. The research led to guidelines to support community-based SIA (see *Impact Connector* # 14).

Several themes emerge for IA practice across these papers. SIA plays an important part in helping to build the sustainability and wellbeing of rural areas. There is an underutilised place for SIA research to inform IA practice when it is applied to projects, plans and policies by providing data on key issues, and to develop frameworks and assessment criteria, including integration of social and ecological concepts. There is increasing expectation that when SIA is applied in rural Aotearoa there will be an emphasis on community-based approaches and planning partnerships, with co-production of knowledge.

Mike Mackay helped to develop this topic. We thank him and the authors for their contributions, Richard Morgan for his help editing these papers and his work producing the issue. We also thank Larrisa Hinds for her help with copy editing and welcome her as a co-editor of *Impact Connector*. We are always interested if anyone wants to propose a topic or help to coordinate and edit an issue of *Impact Connector*. We also encourage contributions on a current topic. Please contact admin@nzaia.org.nz if you want to propose a topic, have any questions or want to assist in any way - see current and proposed topics on the main *Impact Connector* web page.

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The drivers and agents of on-farm change in Aotearoa New Zealand

Nicholas Kirk

Introduction

Agricultural land use in Aotearoa New Zealand has a significant impact on rural landscapes as well as the social, cultural, environmental, and economic wellbeing of the nation. However, agriculture in New Zealand – in particular, intensive agriculture – contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient pollution in surface and groundwater, land clearance and loss of biodiversity, among other environmental issues (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment 2004, 2015; Ministry for the Environment and Statistics NZ 2022). Given the negative impacts of agricultural land use on New Zealand's environment, there is interest in how on-farm change may be stimulated to encourage a transition towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly land use practices.

This article summarises recent and ongoing research examining on-farm change in New Zealand. It describes two projects: one completed and one ongoing. The completed project examines different on-farm drivers of change, with a focus on the Canterbury region, and explains how these drivers are mediated by individual farmer willingness and ability to make changes. The ongoing project examines the different agents of change which are encouraging sustainability transitions in New Zealand, including both human and non-human agents. The conclusion to the article, raises some implications of this research for impact assessment.

Drivers of change

Two reports were recently written for Environment Canterbury – a literature review examining drivers of change (Kirk et al. 2022a), and a follow-up report which conducted interviews with 29 farmers to see how drivers have (or have not) triggered on-farm change in Canterbury (Kirk et al. 2023). In these projects, the authors classified different drivers into broad categories: policy and regulation, environmental, economic, knowledge and technology, and social drivers. Different drivers were then identified within these broad categories (see Table 1).

The research confirmed that drivers of change do not act in isolation, with farmers typically responding to multiple, simultaneous, and interacting drivers at any given time. This complexity makes it difficult to identify which driver(s) influence on-farm change. Even if farmers experience the same driver simultaneously – such as a new pest species, a natural hazard, or the signing of a new international trade agreement – the impact on individual farms will vary depending on farmer ability and willingness to adopt change.

Ability to make on-farm changes was shaped by the cost of those changes, with certain pro-environmental changes such as fencing and planting costing more than many farmers could afford. Ability to change is also affected by size, with farms of smaller land area and smaller cash flows having fewer options to change in response to drivers. Willingness to make on-farm changes was strongly influenced by farmers' sense of self-determination and agency. Farmers may seek external input, advice, or information on changes – and they may ratify advice and information they receive with informal networks – but they

Table 1. Contemporary drivers of change on-farm in New Zealand.

Policy and regulation	Environmental drivers	Economic drivers	Knowledge and technology drivers	Social drivers
Market-based tools	Droughts	Debt	Professional advice on farm change	Public pressure
Voluntary schemes	Floods	Profit	Education and access to extension services	Farmer-to-farmer networks
Regulation	Fires	Capital	New machinery and technology	Family circumstances and succession
Anticipation of stricter regulation	Storms	Access to loans	New products such as imported fertiliser	Alternative agricultural movements (e.g. regenerative farming, organic farming, agroecology)
Subsidies and agri-environmental schemes	Livestock diseases	Commodity prices	Optimal application of agrochemicals enabled by spatial data	Narratives (e.g. 'Feed the world', 'Dirty dairying', etc.)
	Plant and crop diseases	Market volatility		Farming press
	Biosecurity	Labour availability		
	Biodiversity	Supply chain standards		
	Animal pests	Consumer demands		
	Plant and crop pests	International trade agreements		

see themselves as the ultimate decision maker, rather than being influenced by outside drivers or events (Kirk et al. 2022b).

Typically, the changes we observed were made to ensure the continuity and persistence of the current farm system, rather than changes which substantially reshape their farm system (Kirk et al. 2022b). The interview data confirmed that farmers in Canterbury are willing and able to make various on-farm changes in response to different drivers, such as upgrading technology for efficiency gains (e.g. shifting to centre pivot irrigation, or investing in variable rate irrigation), as well as keeping reserve feed and equipment in preparation for different natural hazard events. Farmers were also driven to make on-farm changes out of concerns for soil health, livestock welfare, and biodiversity. However, the interviewed farmers were not typically contemplating radical alternative land uses or major on-farm changes.

These projects highlighted the complex relationship between external drivers of change, and individual farmers' willingness and ability to make changes in response. The ongoing Agents of Change project further explores this complexity.

Agents of change

An ongoing Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment funded research project – *Moving the middle: empowering land managers to act in complex rural landscapes* – seeks to enable and encourage farmers and land managers to make voluntary changes to improve the sustainability of their practices. It will do this by identifying and using intervention points for change in systems affecting land manager decisions.

One project research area examines agents of change on land. These agents are broadly conceived either as individual people, collectives, or non-human agents. The researchers target agents that have not been commonly researched and/or agents that have not been commonly recognised and supported in their roles. The aims are, first, to understand which agents are effective at supporting a shift towards more sustainable practices on the land, and second, to devise methods to understand these agents and make them more relatable and supportable.

When people typically conceive of agents of change in agriculture, they often think of agricultural advisors and extension agents. These agents have a long history of research, both internationally (Black 2000) and in the New Zealand context (Ministry for Primary Industries 2015). Other conventional agents, such as financial advisors (Hilkens et al. 2018), have also been studied in a New Zealand context. These conventional agents typically conceive of on-farm change as a top-down process whereby information, advice, and technology are transferred from scientists, engineers, and other specialists to farmers.

The agents of change research projects look beyond conventional agents towards more unconventional agents. The research team think there is a greater diversity of agents than is currently being supported and recognised. Thus, the agents of change project is examining seven different case studies of agents. In order, these agents include: 1) information / knowledge brokers; 2) technology; 3) community mobilisers; 4) the voice of the environment and future generations; 5) youth; 6) agents who change relationship between humans and the environment, and 7) spiritual and physical reconnection of Māori with land.

Cases have been chosen to highlight a range of agents that work at different depths of systemic intervention, from shallower interventions to those with deeper interventions. The concept of 'leverage depth' has been adopted from systems thinking (Meadows 1999). Further 'down' or 'within' a system, the greater the leverage an agent is able to apply to influence the situation. Deeper leverage points often work on mindsets or values which help establish the system or keeps the system in place. It's for this reason the research team theorises that agents who work on changing people's relationship with nature, or reconnecting them to nature, will operate at the deepest leverage point – as they have the potential to change people's values or mindsets.

Some of these case studies will also examine non-human agents. We found evidence from previous research that non-human agents use their agency to influence change on land. For example, in Contesse et al. (2021) the authors trace the impact of the invasive bagrada bug (*Bagrada hilaris)*, and its role in provoking changes towards sustainable pest management in Chile by creating and mediating relationships between different human actors. In a New Zealand example, Dwiartama (2017) examined Psa-V disease as an agent that effects the New Zealand kiwifruit industry.

Our first step in analysing the effectiveness of these different agents has been to initiate a survey amongst non-farming entities: local government staff as well as others with an interest in or mandate to manage and protect the environment. The survey examines different conventional and non-conventional agents, assessing how relevant, recognised, and supported they are in New Zealand at present. Analysis of the survey results is ongoing, and we hope to publish the findings later in 2024.

Conclusions

The impacts of drivers and agents on agricultural land use and rural landscapes is complex and multifaceted. Diverse agents and drivers can influence farmers to make changes, but farmers remain the ultimate decision makers. Individual farmer ability and willingness to change mediates their response to different external drivers or agents. This complexity makes it difficult to predict and model or even attribute how diverse agricultural land users will respond to different influences.

An implication for impact assessment is that the future consequences of current or proposed legislative or regulatory changes aimed at farming, agriculture, or rural land use will be difficult to predict. This may drive more demand for impact assessment to better understand the social and environmental effects of legislative and regulatory change. The influence of non-human drivers – such as climate change, disease species, or new technologies – will also be difficult to predict.

Another implication is that a wider range of agents than typically conceived of may affect land use. These include: agents who have not been well recognised or supported – such as youth; agents (like artists) who can change the relationship between humans and the environment; and agents who enable spiritual and physical reconnection of Māori with the land (whenua).

Addressing the long-term environmental issues related to intensive agriculture – such as greenhouse gas emissions, freshwater pollution, land clearance, and loss of biodiversity – will require farmers to contemplate and then make major on-farm changes, changes that are likely to reshape their farm system fundamentally. The farmers we interviewed in Canterbury were willing and able to make minor changes, but few appeared to be contemplating major changes at this time. However, we argue that the agents of change that may be able to encourage and enable this system change are currently not well supported. Rather, agents whose work enables farmers to retain the continuity of their farm system – such as farm advisors, agricultural extension agents, financial advisors, and fertiliser representatives, etc. – are typically better supported, more visible, and well researched.

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Social-ecological assessment for remote and island communities

Katherine Russell, James Russell, and Nick Taylor

Introduction

Remote and island communities pose challenges for the practice of impact assessment. These challenges arise from the characteristics of isolated places. This article focuses on inhabited islands to illustrate applications of impact assessment in island communities, while acknowledging there are also remote mainland communities that have many of the characteristics found on inhabited islands.

The inhabited offshore islands of Aotearoa New Zealand present unique possibilities but also difficulties with scaling up ecological restoration programmes involving pest removal. Planned changes require strategic social and ecological impact assessment. To illustrate, we use the example of programmes to eradicate mammalian predators in three inhabited islands of Aotearoa New Zealand: Aotea Great Barrier, Rakiura Stewart Island and Rēkohu Chatham Islands [1].

These three island groups provide lessons on planning for sustainable and resilient outcomes of ecological programmes, which we have found are enhanced through appropriate methods of community engagement and the co-production of social and ecological knowledge (see also Taylor and Mackay, 2025, in this issue). Lessons from these islands help to extend our social-ecological framework for practicing impact assessment with people and communities of inhabited islands and remote places.

Islands and remote communities

Inhabited offshore islands of Aotearoa New Zealand present problems for the practice of impact assessment. They represent complex social-ecological systems that require application of social impact assessment (SIA) alongside strong community participation to develop programmes such as the eradication of mammalian predators (Russell et al., 2017). This has also proven to be the case for Australia's Lord Howe Island, population around 350, where over 20 years of planning to eradicate introduced rodents has seen numerous technical, economic and other assessments including a human health assessment (Walsh, et al., 2019, p526).

The subject islands have long-standing populations: Aotea Great Barrier (est. population 1040 in 2023), Rakiura Stewart Island (est. 2023 population 450) and Rēkohu Chatham Islands (est. 2023 population 730). Their associated communities are generally rural in character compared to more urbanised and much less isolated islands such as Waiheke in the Hauraki Gulf, Auckland, the country's largest island population. Socially and ecologically, they have similarities to remote mainland areas, such as Fiordland in Southland, South Westland, and northern areas of the West Coast and Golden Bay in the South Island, and Northland and East Cape in the North Island.

The inhabited islands are distinct from the major conservation islands such as Kapiti, where the human-ecological interface is largely around people visiting for relatively short periods. An early social impact assessment there, for example, focused on visitor experiences and management (Sutton, 1992), or Little Barrier, where the interface is narrowed to conservation managers and researchers.

The natural environments of the three subject island groups are of considerable conservation interest, with habitats and ecosystems that are physically and ecologically interconnected with their coastal marine environment. Aotea and Rakiura are relatively unmodified in comparison to mainland New Zealand with large areas of designated conservation land, reserves or national park. Chatham and nearby Pitt island (Rēkohu) are widely modified but still retain significant conservation values. All three major islands have smaller offshore islands with varying human interaction and ecological value. There are important ecological values in the islets and rock stacks used as island sanctuaries and restoration sites.

Land tenure varies across the three islands with areas of privately owned land, Māori land and conservation land. Much of Rakiura is administered by DOC, with 80% of the island forming the Rakiura National Park, 6% is in a Māori lands trust and just 2% is private land (Russell et al., 2017). Rēkohu, on the other hand, is largely private land with smaller areas of conservation and iwi land. The Hāpūpū/J.M. Barker Historic Reserve and the islets of Rangatira and Mangere are of national significance. Other important natural areas are held by private owners [2].

The islands have natural-resource, multifunctional, economies based around a mix of commercial fishing, farming, recreational hunting and fishing, conservation work, hospitality and tourism. The economic mix varies across the islands. The Rēkohu economy is based on fishing and extensive farming with some limited tourist activity and a legacy of boom and bust in these key sectors (Barker, 1984). On Rakiura fishing has dominated the economy for many years, alongside outdoor recreation with tramping and hunting. A few attempts at farming were unsuccessful in this harsh environment. Visitor numbers and types have increased there over time, with noticeable growth since the designation of the Rakiura National Park (Russell, et al., 2017). Similarly, Aotea has limited areas of farming and a heavy reliance on the visitor sector and conservation work.

The populations on these islands have varied considerably historically being strongly related to their changing economic activity. More recently they have been stable between 2006 and 2013 for Rakiura 402 then 408 usually resident, and Rēkohu 609 and 663, while Aotea has shown more growth, from 867 to 930. However, noting the 2023 census populations, all now exhibit growth over 2018-2023 with strong amenity values attracting new residents and growing visitor sectors.

The three islands all have people employed in community services such as marae, a small supermarket, early childhood and primary education, primary health and social work, electricity and telecommunications, banking, freight or postal services [3]. The viability of these services is heavily influenced by the level of business activity, employment and population on the island. Residents, businesses and services face the additional fixed costs of infrastructure, and freight charges on most items. Therefore, transport, telecommunications, and the high costs of housing and living are key issues for these populations, affecting their resilience and ability to adapt to change.

The level of isolation is a particular issue for Rēkohu, where air services have remained relatively stable over time but with local concerns about costs, whereas shipping services are a perennial problem given the need for a multi-purpose vessel that can carry a range of freight as well as livestock exported to the mainland. In comparison, Rakiura and Aotea have relatively stable and regular (daily) sea ferries and air services. The reliance on, and vulnerabilities with, sea and air transport on the islands has some parallels with the vulnerabilities of road transport for mainland remote communities.

In addition to physical and social distances and limited social connection, the islands, consistent with mainland remote communities, face issues around the delivery of a full range of services. The persistent loss of young and working-age people for education and work, and high seasonal population turnover, undermine social capital. Access to whanau and family connection and support during times of family stress add to the challenges facing the services that work with remote families.

People on these islands therefore look to build social capital and are highly motivated and engaged around conservation, economic and social development. Each island has active volunteers, fundraisers and other social events all helping to build social capital. When developing a work programme or development project, however, there is often limited local capacity, creating a dependence on outside knowledge and technical skills at the expense of local knowledge and mātauranga.

Planning example: The management of invasive species

The islands of Aotearoa New Zealand were engines of adaptation and speciation, but their isolation left ecosystems vulnerable to novel stresses from invasive mammalian predators, including cats (*Felis catus)*, rats (*Rattus* spp.), possums (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) and hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*). Today there are complex human-ecological problems around the eradication of these invasive species to protect the many endemic species endangered by them. So far, the focus here and internationally has been on the eradication of mammalian predators from uninhabited islands, creating sanctuaries for endangered species and ecological restoration well away from human populations.

However from 2016, the national mission of Predator Free 2050 has led to an understanding that invasive species management will need to be scaled up considerably from small uninhabited islands and a few, small, intensely managed areas of the mainland. This mission is highly technical but also a community-based effort across the motu, with over 1000 groups and iwi registered for predator control in their communities. The larger inhabited islands of Aotea, Rakiura and Rēkohu are a focus, as are remote mainland "islands" such as parts of Fiordland (Hollyford Valley) and South Westland. Together these efforts to eradicate mammalian predators at larger scales present a novel challenge, requiring a strategic approach to test ecological and social feasibility and plan an appropriate approach (Russell and Taylor, 2018).

Eradication of introduced species on inhabited islands is more than merely undertaking pest control and management. It requires a strategic process to obtain the social licence to operate and build community support over time around issues like the use of toxins or the maintenance of hunting (Russell et al., 2017). The links between natural values, conservation and tourism are important, with visitor activity arising from interests in natural environments, species recovery and biodiversity restoration.

Therefore, there is an increasing understanding amongst ecologist and conservation mangers that social impact assessment is an important tool for planning and implementing an eradication programme (Russell, et al., 2018). Social Impact Assessment (SIA) is especially valuable for the co-production of knowledge incorporating local and iwi knowledge with technical expertise (Taylor and Mackay, 2022, 2024).

A detailed social impact assessment of Rakiura, for example, provided insights into the issues around a predator-management project for biodiversity enhancement. Rakiura can be characterised (Dillon, 2005) as a community that exhibits traditional rural and island characteristics of self-reliance and resilience, with an emphasis on individual action alongside an evident willingness to pitch in and work collectively to resolve issues and find local solutions.

The assessment was a strategic SIA, focused on what was needed to advance a suggested programme of conservation work rather than a single project. Historically, eradications were primarily undertaken as single projects but Predator Free Rakiura is better understood as a programme of conservation work that is likely to include several eradication projects.

The SIA process on Rakiura involved well-practiced steps of scoping, description of the social baseline, and assessment of strategic alternatives to achieve biodiversity goals along with social-economic benefits. The alternatives considered were around pest control working towards eradications, and ways for the community to be involved in planning, implementation and ongoing management such as biosecurity. An essential element of this SIA was the integrated approach between social and ecological sciences, conservation managers and local knowledge.

Key characteristics of islands and remote places

To enhance this integration, a framework was developed by Taylor, et al. (2020) to distinguish typical social and ecological characteristics of inhabited islands. This framework is summarised and adapted here to provide a generic list: key characteristics of inhabited islands and other remote places in Aotearoa New Zealand to use as a check list when planning and conducting an impact assessment including any baseline research and the approach to community engagement.

Isolation
Isolation means species and habitats that are vulnerable to external events such as the arrival of an invasive plant, predator or disease. Societally, isolation has direct effects on options for livelihoods, the extent of social networks and available capitals. Often management and governance are separated from the island or remote community, encouraging populations to innovate and seek local solutions to problems. Economic linkages are also affected by isolation, such as distance from markets. To some extent, digital technologies and air transport, including helicopters, have overcome aspects of isolation.

Boundedness
The physical ocean boundary separates island biota and society from the mainland. The ocean provides a barrier to potential invasive species and defines islands as a place, as do rivers and mountains limiting road connections in remote mainland places such as mountain valleys. Boundedness provides a distinct sense of place, of belonging and a sense of insider/outsider. Remote populations understand the limits that require them to define leadership and solve local problem using a combination of local and extra-local resources.

Scale

The scale of offshore islands and remote places affects ecosystems, people and places. There are tight linkages between terrestrial and marine environments: ki uta ki tai. Scale limits the ability to plan and manage resources and development such as restoration and regeneration actions. Tight social relationships and networks provide cohesion but often create conflicts between competing interests. Small scale limits the options for livelihoods, markets, services and social connection.

Dependence

Many dependencies exist in island systems. Within island ecological networks there are dependencies between land and sea for breeding and feeding of sea birds. Healthy ecological services (marine and terrestrial) support commercial fishing, outdoor recreation (hunting, fishing, tramping), and tourism businesses. Everyone is dependent on transport services. Schools and health care are heavily dependent on wellbeing of individuals and whānau, and the size of the population. Communities often depend on external funding and expertise.

Migration

Islands are species depauperate so they are affected by migration and novel species introductions by humans, which can enrich but also create threats to native ecosystems. Socially, newcomers bring new skills and financial and social capital, although new people and ideas can also be threatening. However, immigration and visitor numbers are limited by transport capacity and available housing and infrastructure. Commonly, islands and remote areas are affected when people, skills, experience or capital leave.

Complexity

In the absence of biological constraints, introduced plants and animals, new human land uses and tourism visitors can cause complex new biological relationships and test carrying capacities. External administrative systems, regulations and financial systems create layers of relative complexity around ecology, economy and communities. People and cultures hold complex local knowledge, often in oral form. Individuals become used to taking on multiple jobs and often fill multiple roles within a community.

Resilience

Island ecologies, economies and social wellbeing are vulnerable to stressors such as, biosecurity incursions, natural hazards and climate events. Stressors include transport failures, the loss of a source of employment, loss of cultural values or even loss of a key person from the community. Reduced resilience means a reduced ability to adapt to change. Initiatives that support and work with local capacity and knowledge have positive potential outcomes.

Conclusions

SIA is essential in the design of major projects and programmes on inhabited islands and for remote places. This paper provides strong support for the use of strategic SIA in increasingly ambitious projects and programmes based in islands and remote communities, such as introduced mammalian predator eradications. Social and ecological assessments require capable, knowledgeable and experienced teams to work in an integrated way incorporating local knowledge, including mātauranga, and experience. A social-ecological framework can assist with shaping these assessments conceptually. In islands and remote places assessments also require sufficient time and financial resources, plus a commitment to processes for the co-production of knowledge, and to collaborative approaches and partnerships for planning and implementing a project.

Footnotes

[1] Each of these islands has several islets and rock stacks. In this paper we refer to these island groups in singular and use their indigenous names

[2] https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/habitats/offshore-islands/chatham-islands/

[3] See Social Service Providers Aotearoa (2019).

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The Impact of Substandard Rural Housing on Resilience and Wellbeing in Te Tai Tokerau

Gillian Stewart

Introduction

Te Tai Tokerau (Northland) is one of New Zealand's most rural and impoverished regions, facing unique and significant housing issues. In a region where more than half the population live outside an urban centre, in predominantly ageing housing stock, and experience high levels of social deprivation, substandard housing in Te Tai Tokerau's rural, isolated areas has long been a major concern, particularly for the large Māori population.

The resilience of families and rural communities depends on the resilience and performance of their homes to provide warmth, comfort, safety and protection. Improving the building envelope and habitability of rural Northland's ageing housing stock is needed. However, affordability, access to skills and resources, and the remote, invisible nature of the problems are key constraints.

This article reviews existing research on housing quality, noting the unique challenges and issues faced by homes and communities in rural Northland. It highlights Habitat for Humanity's experience addressing substandard housing across the region through its delivery of the Healthy Homes and Home Repair Programmes.[1] It illuminates the prevalence and issues of rural Northland's substandard housing; its impact on families and community, the housing sector and society more broadly; and what more can be done to improve people's right to a decent, adequate home.

The right to a decent home

As a signatory to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and multiple other international human rights treaties, Aotearoa New Zealand has agreed to ensure that the right to decent, adequate housing is progressively realised in this country. According to Te Kāhui Tika Tangata New Zealand Human Rights Commission[2], a decent, adequate home does not simply mean a roof over people's heads but one that is affordable, habitable, is accessible and meets our needs, is located so that we can participate fully in society, has access to core services and infrastructure essential to our health, security and dignity, and reflects respect for cultural diversity.

Housing is a key determinant of health and human, social, cultural and economic wellbeing of families and communities, having profound impacts on every aspect of our lives, sustainable development and societal progress. However, the incidence of substandard housing in New Zealand is significant. According to the 2018/19 *Pilot Household Survey* [3] of the sample of 800 homes assessed, 43% were in moderate condition, requiring repairs and maintenance in the next two years and 11% were in poor/serious condition, requiring immediate, significant repairs and maintenance. For the first time, in 2018, the Census introduced questions about household mould, dampness and access to amenities, with these questions repeated in 2023. Whilst there has been a marginal improvement the 2023 Census still identifies that dampness was present in one in seven (14%) New Zealand homes, and mould was evident in one in six (16.9%). Some 7074 of households lacked access to at least one of six basic amenities. Of these six basic amenities drinkable tap-water (3.5 % of dwellings) followed by a refrigerator (3%) and electricity (1.7% of dwellings) were most lacking.

Reinforcing these concerns are worrying trends that landlords and homeowners increasingly are unwilling or unable to spend on repairs and maintenance. According to White et al.'s (2024) analysis are of the 2018/19 PHS and the Household Economic Survey, reported maintenance spend by New Zealand households was approximately $2 billion, significantly short of the study's estimated recommended mid-range spend[4] of around $15.7 billion. Whilst research and statistics have informed the introduction of key public policy, legislation and government-funded programmes to address poor housing conditions and improve health and energy outcomes in recent decades for those most at risk[5], repairs and maintenance of the ageing national housing stock have been left largely to homeowners and the market to solve.

In many countries overseas it is recognised that repairs, maintenance and stock up-grade is a significant component of maintaining the national infrastructure (Saville-Smith et al., 2008; Parsons et al., 2023). In New Zealand, there is limited political appetite to take such a national, long-term and systematic view, or to shoulder the associated costs and risks. However, the costs and risks of an ageing and ignored inventory of homes will only increase over time and be passed onto future generations, severely compounding the housing crisis and the associated socio-cultural, health and economic impacts at family, community and society-wide levels.

Homes in Rural Northland

Statistically, Northland has one of the highest rates of people experiencing severe housing deprivation in the country, second only to Gisborne[6]. Whilst on average 98% of households have access to basic amenities[7], 204 homes in Northland stated a lack of access to any of these in the 2023 Census. Some 4.6% of Northland homes (3,276) lacked access to safe tap water. In the Far North as many as 7.3% of households (1,511) stated a lack of this amenity. 2.3% of households (1,374) in Northland lack an electricity supply. Some 24.6% (14,649) of Northland homes experience damp, (3.8% always and 20.8% sometimes), compared to 20.1% in Auckland and 18.1% nationally. 20.4% (12,096) of Northland households stated experiencing mould (5.7% always mouldy and 14.7% sometimes). Some 7.2% of households are crowded.

The 2023 Census data reflects a marginal improvement of around 2% in terms of Northland households stating the experience of damp, mould and access to basic amenities since 2018, which is most likely balanced by the number of new builds since 2018. It is impossible to determine a change, whether improvement or further deterioration, of individual dwellings based on Census data. Rather, it represents an historical and ongoing negative trend, requiring large scale remediation.

Acknowledgement and attention have been given to the severity of poor housing conditions and habitability in Te Tai Tokerau for over 40 years. Indeed, it has long been an issue that successive policy interventions have largely struggled to resolve since the 1988 National Housing Commission's report noted that:

"Māori households in the Tai Rawhiti (East Coast), Tai Tokerau (Northland) and Rotorua/Whakatane areas … have the most serious unmet housing need in the country in terms of the proportion of households suffering acute housing problems and the duration and severity of the problems…Substandard conditions were also widely cited and ranged from houses being condemned, having inadequate sanitation facilities, to lack of power or water connected to the house."

The failure of the 1990s housing reforms to recognise supply-side barriers to housing access in rural areas and the use of the Accommodation Supplement as the primary mechanism of housing assistance meant that sub-standard rural housing was largely unaddressed. Housing assistance delivered through Accommodation Supplements simply could not address the drivers of substandard housing, including:

- long-term private and public under investment in housing;
- poor building practices and regulatory non-compliance and unconsented builds and renovations using inappropriate materials for the environmental conditions;
- under-maintenance of the housing stock; and
- the inappropriate design and size of the housing stock for the use to which it is put, particularly when rates of dilapidation are increased where there is persistent overcrowding.

By the late 1990s, housing in rural Te Tai Tokerau was found to be older, on average, than the national stock; even homes less than 10 years old were severely dilapidated; and the use of garages, caravans and temporary structures for long-term accommodation was considerable (Saville-Smith and Wehipeihana, 2007). In addition, as Māori returned to rural areas due to diminishing employment opportunities and increasingly unaffordable housing in cities, the pressures on Northland's rural housing stock and supply increased, and the problems of sub-standard housing, overcrowding, and an under-supply of well-maintained, adequately constructed houses were exacerbated.

In 2001, the Rural Housing Programme[8] was established and implemented by Housing New Zealand. It had an ambitious goal of the elimination of sub-standard housing in Northland, the East Coast and Eastern Bay of Plenty regions which experienced persistent and concentrated stocks of dilapidated housing, posing significant health and safety risks to those who lived in them.

According to the 2006 Te Tai Tokerau House Condition Survey (HCS)[9], part of an evaluation of the Rural Housing Programme, some 28.8% of Te Tai Tokerau dwellings surveyed required assistance because of poor or serious house condition. This compared with 19.7% in the East Coast and Eastern Bay of Plenty rural areas and 2.7% for the national stock. In 2006, it was estimated that the cost of repairs to homes in Te Tai Tokerau alone could range from $77.6 million to $122.6 million. Following the evaluation and after 10 years and nearly $140 million spent on the scheme —and only 2,900 houses repaired across all three regions— the Rural Housing Programme was dis-established in 2011. Whilst living conditions had improved for some families, the programme under-delivered, did not provide good value for money because the improvements were not sustainable, and the extent and severity of substandard housing was severely underestimated (Saville-Smith, 2007).

The Programme and its associated research and analysis demonstrated the persistent and significant housing stress faced by Māori households, particularly in Te Tai Tokerau. Alongside trends in financial strain due to housing costs and a notable decline in Māori home ownership rates, the high incidence of poor housing conditions, including issues related to dampness, cold, and disrepair, disproportionately affected Māori communities. Findings underscored the urgent need for targeted housing interventions and policy adjustments to address the disparities in housing conditions and affordability experienced by Māori. This contributed to the establishment of the Māori Housing Network through Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK) in 2015[10].

From October 2015 to June 2017, the Network invested $40.7 million in 158 projects across Te Tai Tokerau, Ikaroa-Rāwhiti and Waikato-Waiariki, including: 63 affordable housing units; infrastructure support for 182 whānau homes; 42 papakāinga development and infrastructure support projects; 15 emergency housing projects; 387 urgent and essential whānau home repairs; 108 building condition assessments; and 43 capability building projects (Litmus, 2018). Te Tai Tokerau had received 34 % the Network funding (approximately $14 million) and received more funding than the other regions to improve housing quality ($4,905,037).

Research and analysis commissioned by TPK, MSD and MHUD in 2018-19[11] sought to establish the incidence and cost of repairs in rural Te Tai Tokerau. It estimated that 29% of homes (6,047) were in poor and serious condition, requiring an average repair spend of $33,437 per dwelling, generating an estimated total repair cost of $205 million (Saville-Smith, Brunsdon and White, 2018/9, p.7). By 2022, TPK's Māori Housing Strategy[12] had invested some $170 million, $80 million of which had facilitated critical repairs for over 2,000 Māori households in 5 years[13]. Te Tai Tokerau had received roughly $19.4 million (11%) of that total investment and $11.5 million (14%) of investment in critical housing repairs for 316 homes. In 2021/22, the average cost of repairs to Te Tai Tokerau's substandard housing, eligible for funding[14], was nearly $53,000 per house (including administrative costs provided to the contracted rōpū/ service provider).

Despite significant investment it was noted in 2020/21 that: "demand across the rohe has far exceeded the amount of funding Te Puni Kōkiri has available. Alongside this, the impact of COVID-19 has required us to refine our priorities for immediate investments. This has meant Te Puni Kōkiri cannot fund every proposal that has been submitted, as much as we would like to." (TPK, 2021).

A further 2020 report by Te Runanga a Iwi o Ngāpuhi in the Utakura area showed that:

"a significant number of houses…did not meet (TPKs) criteria for essential repairs because of building consent issues, the makeshift nature of the dwellings and/or that the houses were in such a state of disrepair that it was assessed to be more economical to demolish them…" (Maynard, 2020, cited in George et al., 2021)

TPK's targeted investment in improving sub-standard housing for Māori is the only government programme currently seeking to address home repairs and maintenance issues. However, the programme suffers from a substantial gap between levels of funding and delivery, so is unable to match the actual prevalence, scale and complexity of the substandard issues. Worse, under the current government it is still unclear to what extent the programme will continue. Whilst it is evident that poor quality and substandard housing in rural Northland remains largely unaddressed for Māori and non-Māori households, the challenge is that we may witness a period of disinvestment and further deterioration.

Habitat's experience

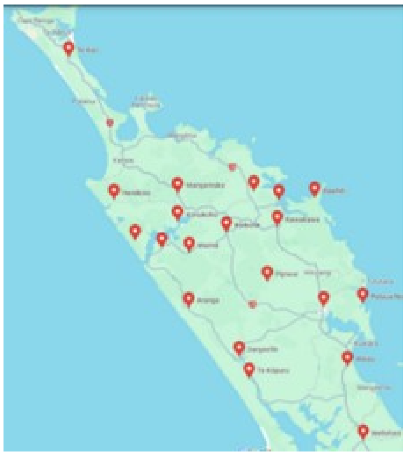
Habitat for Humanity Northern Region[15] is a registered charity and Community Housing Provider that has been supporting families and whānau across Te Tai Tokerau since 2014. Alongside the provision of new affordable rental and homeownership housing, Habitat supports housing adequacy, energy-efficiency and habitability outcomes to improve whānau's health, safety and wellbeing through its Healthy Homes Programme (HHP), and the repair and renovation services of the Home Repairs Programme (HRP). These programmes are delivered throughout the Whangārei, Kaipara and Far North Districts by a small, Whangārei-based team of mobile 'handymen' who are trained healthy home assessors with backgrounds in the local building trade.

HHP is part of the Te Whatu Ora Healthy Homes Initiative[16] in partnership with health providers, supporting families referred to Habitat because of poor health attributed to living in substandard housing. This programme is core funded annually by Te Whatu Ora – Health NZ contracts and supported by Foundation North and a small number of local gaming trusts. Together this enables Habitat to sustain a rolling average of about 200 referrals (renters or homeowners) per year in Northland. Alongside home assessments, families are supported to make minor improvements to the thermal envelope of their whare, thereby reducing cold, damp, and mouldy conditions through a range of interventions such as curtains, draught excluders, mould cleaning kits, educational material and minor repairs to doors, windows, plumbing and electrics.

The second part of Habitat's housing adequacy service is the Home Repair Programme (HRP) which provides impactful home repairs and renovations to predominantly elderly, low- and middle-income homeowners, who are unable to afford or undertake essential repairs and maintenance to their home. This includes repairs to homes that have significant and urgent weathertightness issues which affect homeowner wellbeing, health and/or accessibility, such as new roofing, windows and doors, disabled accessible bathrooms or ramps, exterior cladding repairs, water damage or electrical rewiring. This programme is made possible through a partnership with BNZ which provides loan capital that enables Habitat to provide an interest-free service to undertake the necessary repairs, with families paying back the loan over 5 years. However, due to affordability issues for clients, contracting prohibitions on charging families for Habitat's operational costs, and a lack of government and philanthropic funding, it has limited capacity to support any more than between 5-15 households per year in Northland. Whilst Māori whānau can be supplemented through Te Puni Kōkiri home repair grants, unfunded operational costs are generally supported through largely ad hoc funding grants, such as Foundation North.

Whilst these two housing adequacy programmes historically evolved as distinct services due largely to finance opportunities and government funding regimes, in Northland they have recently been integrated. Given the type of need experienced by whānau in Te Tai Tokerau, there is large demand for critical repairs that are outside the scope and funding outcomes of HHP. Many of the homes of HHP whānau need HRP interventions to make them weathertight, safe and structurally sound, issues causing coldness, damp and unhealthy living conditions. The integrated, more comprehensive housing adequacy service enables Habitat to innovate, combine budgets, resources and skills, providing more vulnerable families with access to a broader range of coordinated services and interventions.

Over the past year, Habitat Northern's Housing Adequacy Service has worked with over 200 whānau across the rohe. It is estimated that about 25% of these have needed extra, critical help with the substandard condition of their home. This level and type of demand far exceeds Habitat's capacity and funding, although in the last year some 20 whānau requiring critical repairs to their homes have been supported.



As illustrated by the Census statistics, Habitat's work represents only the tip of an iceberg. However, the Census indicators and data derived simply fail to convey the reality of the poor living conditions faced in Northland and the typical state of the many thousands of homes in rural isolated areas that Habitat support.

Their experience shows many homes in the rural areas are unconsented, poorly built, uninsured and in need of significant upgrades to improve habitability, dryness, warmth and health. Many families do not have the knowledge, time, skill, capacity or money to maintain and keep the roof over their head. Of particular concern are the negative impacts of recent extreme weather events in the region on housing and the additional pressure placed on household's wellbeing and wallets to maintain and repair their homes in light of these events.

Homeowners increasingly are found in financial stress, in significant and unsustainable debt, and unable to pay for housing costs such as repairs, heating and other interventions that keep homes warm, dry, and healthy. People are dealing with the impacts of interest rate rises, a cost-of-living crisis with increasing rent and house prices, questions around regulatory requirements for landlords, and a need for existing housing stock to be fit for purpose. There is significant intergenerational housing need in Te Tai Tokerau, particularly among its rural Māori population.

According to Habitat's 2023 annual survey of those supported by the Housing Adequacy service, in Tai Tokerau, 72% of respondents state the condition of their home is average, poor and/or very poor. 50% state their home lacks weathertightness, which clearly contributes to

experiences of coldness (51%), dampness (50%), mould (43%), and a need to cut back on groceries and household spending to pay energy bills (50%). Some 45% have trouble paying energy bills; 37% were concerned with internal or external hazards, such as electrical faults, rotten flooring; and 19% faced mobility/ access issues, affecting elderly and disabled residents.

Working in this context, Habitat is focused on supporting every household and whānau with knowledge, skills, connections and interventions to maintain a healthy home, build their resilience to uncertainty, and connect them to wider support and resources in the community.

Transitioning from a cold, damp home to a warm, dry home is evidenced to prevent hospitalisations by 20%, and there is reduced severity of illnesses and reduced incidence of respiratory illnesses in particular. When home living conditions are safe, warm and fit for purpose, there are many benefits: families face fewer medical expenses and prescriptions; there are marked improvements in school attendance and educational achievement for children and young people for them; less stress and worry for families; and improved mental and physical health outcomes which contribute to people's productivity in society and the economy and an increased sense of hope, wellbeing, pride and dignity**[17]**.

The challenges of substandard homes in rural Te Tai Tokerau for organisations like Habitat are largely capacity and access, which are determined by the visibility of the problems and the political will and financial capital of government, donors and philanthropic funders. Given the lack of comprehensive, available data representing the scale and complexity housing issues, evidence to demonstrate the impacts of mahi on housing is essential to further advocacy and funding.

As noted by Cameron Mariu, the Healthy Homes Programme Lead in Te Tai Tokara, since 2020, the HHP approach has evolved on the smell of an oily rag with dogged determinism to leverage any resource to hand to make as much difference to each whanau as possible:

"Being my first time working in this kind of environment once I saw some of these living conditions it was hard to walk away. So, using my construction skills I set out completing repairs like replacing old roofing nails with roofing screws; Insulating, lining and plastering walls and in some cases whole living rooms and bedrooms; Fixing leaking taps and minor plumbing work; fixing decks, handrails and stairs.

As my first year came to an end, reporting back on the mahi that we had achieved quickly caught the attention of our major stakeholder, they decided to increase our budget [for] window repairs and started to dabble in bathroom repairs and install curtains. By the third year our stakeholder was blown away by our effort and said to us 'let's see what you can do with some more significant support for homes.' The past two and a half years I'd been working with crumbs and this felt like a lifeline."

Over the past year, the Habitat team in Northland also have begun innovating to address the common issue of household access to electricity. Although there is now the new kohirā solar farm in Kaitaia, plus several Marae with solar panels directly benefiting the tangata around the Marae and various companies offering grid-tied solar, the families that Habitat seek to serve are being left behind. According to Cameron:

"I've lost count of the number of homes, cabins, lean-tos, sheds, homesteads, papakainga that are running generators, or a solar panel whānau bought off trade me wired together with

speaker cable, extension leads running from a central power point powering many cabins as a source of electricity, or in some cases totally off grid. I said to myself the first family I come across I'm going to give solar a go through the critical repairs. ... With the installs we completed to date, they all have had significant financial benefit to the whānau."

When homes are healthy, energy-efficient, affordable and secure, people, whānau and communities can thrive. Habitat's grassroots work is supporting people, one home at a time, to stay living in place, to be safe and well, to be part of their communities, and help preserve the home as an asset and turangawaewae for multiple generations.

Habitat believes in a partnership approach not only with whānau but also with other partners and stakeholders – iwi, community groups, tradies, suppliers, local and central government of housing, energy, financial, community and health services. Collectively, working together in the home, within the local community, regionally and nationally they hope the iceberg of substandard rural housing in Northland can be exposed and addressed.

Conclusions

The recently released 2023 Census results indicate that Northland still fares statistically worse compared to all other regions for dampness, mould and lack of access to basic amenities, and experiences the highest rates of severe housing deprivation[18]. There is a critical lack of current data and research-based evidence that represents the reality of current housing conditions in the region. There is a clear gap between statistical evidence and the realities on the ground.

This effectively renders the complexity, scale and severity of rural Northland's substandard housing more invisible. It prohibits government and societal awareness and the formulation of strategic policy and investment to support the resilience and socio-cultural and economic wellbeing of affected families, whānau and communities. Moreover, it obscures and impedes the critical work community service providers, iwi and charitable organisations such as Habitat for Humanity are doing on the ground, day-to-day, home-by-home, to address the prevalence and effects of substandard housing on behalf of government and society. Under the current government, the invisibility of the issues threatens to undermine, if not halt, the progress and positive impacts delivered by grassroots agencies and supported by government agencies such as TPK, Te Whatu Ora – Health NZ, MSD and MHUD.

Whilst limited in its scale, Habitat's approach to addressing substandard housing and enabling family and community access to healthy, warm, dry and safe homes in Te Tai Tokerau is working, promoting positive impacts for households as well as their local communities and the regional economy. Habitat's approach and contribution to housing adequacy is challenged by affordability – financially-stressed households are often unable to afford the zero-interest loan to cover the required work and the perception that home repair is a personal property issue tends to inhibit funding from community trusts and grant-makers. However, its means of delivery and resulting impacts are easily scaleable if successive governments were to dedicate long-term, consistent attention and investment into repairing and maintaining the country's ageing housing stock.

Drawing upon research of international examples of housing retrofit programmes, a study by BERL (Parsons et.al, 2023) argues that addressing the scope and scale of substandard housing in Aotearoa New Zealand is not impossible. They argue that the lessons of these international examples provide inspiration for a large-scale, government-driven retrofit programme to be piloted in this country. They estimate that concerted efforts to improve homes would deliver benefits to health, mental wellbeing, household incomes and productivity; injecting between $26 - $58 billion into the residential construction and associated industries; and benefits upwards of $50 billion would be observed in the domains of health and energy savings and in the domains of wellbeing, benefits would be upwards of $116 billion. The study argues that retrofits must be affordable and low risk for households, homeowners and organisations, low-income households should be prioritised for grants rather than loans; those with a higher ability to pay should be encouraged with a low interest loan; and it must involve a simple process for participants who only have to interact with a single, trusted point of contact and delivery.

Furthermore, the recent findings of the previous Labour Government-appointed independent Energy Hardship Expert Panel[19] found that energy hardship was rooted in substandard, poor housing conditions, requiring a range of measures to improve the health of people's homes, including that "Government should increase funding for broader repair and improvement work to support home retrofit programmes, through EECA and through Te Puni Kōkiri". The report concluded that despite the government's introduction and funding of key policies such as the Warmer Kiwi Homes programme (2018), Healthy Home Standards (2019), and a number of home repair pilots (2021-2024) these programmes do not address the scale of the problem with New Zealand's housing stock nor the contribution of basic home repair and maintenance to address the urgent and widespread issues of households facing energy hardship:

"It is essential to recognise that for energy-efficiency measures such as insulation to have a tangible impact, homes must first be weather-tight and have a secure building envelope, including roofs, walls, floors, and windows…

Combining home repairs programmes with energy-efficiency programmes such as Warmer Kiwi Homes can lead to cost-effective and mutually reinforcing improvement measures."

This report and its findings and recommendations has now been shelved and is no longer considered under active consideration by the current Government.[20] Whilst the focus on building new homes in Northland's urban areas is important, it doesn't resolve the situation for nearly half of the region's population who live outside of the urban centres in small, isolated rural settlements and communities. It doesn't support people to stay in their rural communities and address the issues of substandard dwellings that should provide for their basic needs, health and wellbeing.

With the likely advent of more extreme climate and weather events, deteriorating and dilapidated rural housing in Te Tai Tokerau, will be severely impacted. The resilience and sustainability of families and communities will be tested and undermined. As the cost of repairs continue to grow at household and societal levels, so do the costs of adverse impacts on the health, financial, social and cultural wellbeing of affected families and the longer-term demands on health and social services, the housing sector and the economy more broadly. Habitat for Humanity's advocacy calls for heightened societal awareness and government intervention, so the impact of substandard rural homes are not passed on to future generations, nor threaten the viability of rural living, whānau connection to their whenua, culture and the right to a decent home.

Footnotes

[1] Habitat also see its new build programme in Northland as part of the housing solution.

[2] See https://tikatangata.org.nz/our-work/housing-inquiry-final-report

[3] The PHS is the latest national BRANZ-led survey of housing conditions, updating on the methodology of the original national House Condition Surveys conducted roughly every 5 years between 1994 and 2015. The PHS gathered information on the internal and external condition of housing for more than 800 houses nationwide and results were linked and analysed alongside Stats NZ survey data. See https://www.branz.co.nz/healthy-homes-research/hcs/

[4] BRANZ recommends that households spend annually 0.5-2% of their property value on maintenance per annum.

[5] These include EnergyWise Homes (2003-2009); Warm Up New Zealand (2009-2013) and its current Warmer Kiwi Homes providing grants to homeowners for underfloor insulation and heating; the Healthy Homes Initiative, initiated in 2013 and expanded in 2017 to improve the living conditions of low-income families with children at risk of hospitalisation; and the Healthy Homes Guarantee Act (2017) and the Healthy Homes Standards which came into law in July 2019, introducing minimum standards for heating, insulation, ventilation, moisture ingress and drainage, and draught stopping in rental properties. Since 2015, Te Puni Kokiri has been funded by successive governments to address home repairs for Māori, alongside other housing initiatives including papakāinga and new housing developments, homeownership and financial capability supports, and capability building programmes. See https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/nga-putea-me-nga-ratonga/maori-housing-support

[6] The Gisborne region was particularly hard hit by the cyclone events of early 2023, with almost 1 in 3 homes there experiencing dampness at the time of the census, https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/home-ownership-increases-and-housing-quality-improves/

[7] Living in uninhabitable housing is defined as one that lacks access to one of six basic amenities – safe drinking water, electricity, cooking facilities, a kitchen sink, bath or shower, toilet inside the home and in working order.

[8] In 2001, the Government demanded that officials actively address the problem of sub-standard housing in Northland, the East Coast and the Eastern Bay of Plenty through a co-ordinated, intersectoral policy and delivery response. Led by Housing New Zealand, one part of the programme was directed primarily at improving dwellings and the dwelling stock through the delivery of a series of products and increased access to rental housing. The other part of the programme was to increase the capacity and capability of individuals, whanau and communities themselves to prevent unmet housing need and, particularly, the exposure to sub-standard housing stock. See Saville-Smith et al. (2007):

https://thehub.sia.govt.nz/assets/documents/Rural%20Housing%20Programme,%20A%20synthesis%20of%20evaluation%20findings%20March%202007.pdf

[9] The HCS intended to provide a baseline for future measurement of changes in the quality of the housing stock subsequent to the stock regeneration interventions to 16047 dwellings that were supposed to be implemented. See Saville-Smith, Brunsdon and White (2019).

[10] This was formed out of the Māori Housing Network Investment Strategy 2015 – 2018, part of He Whare Āhuru He Oranga Tāngata–the Government's Māori Housing Strategy. See https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/o-matou-mohiotanga/housing/maori-housing-network-investment-strategy-2015-201. Adopting a whānau -centred approach, the Network sought to invest strategically in improving the quality of housing for whānau; building the capability of whānau, hapū and iwi within the Māori housing sector; and increasing the supply of affordable housing for Māori. See Litmus (2018).

[11] Te Puni Kokiri, MSD and Housing New Zealand commissioned a set of five reports to establish the extent of Māori housing need in Te Tai Tokerau, in order to support the effective allocation of funding to address serious housing need. See Saville-Smith, Brunsdon and White, (2019); James and Saville-Smith (2019).

[12] The Māori Housing Network has continued as Whai Kāinga Whai Oranga since 2022. Whai Kāinga Whai Oranga has a commitment of $730 million over four years to accelerate Māori-led housing solutions and is delivered jointly by Te Puni Kōkiri and Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga (Ministry for Housing and Urban Development, HUD). See https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/nga-putea-me-nga-ratonga/maori-housing-support/whai-kainga-whai-oranga

[13] For a summary of Te Puni Kokiri's home repair programme, see

https://www.tpk.govt.nz/en/nga-putea-me-nga-ratonga/maori-housing-support/repairs-to-whanau-owned-homes

[14] Te Puni Kōkiri fund rōpū to coordinate repair programmes in communities. Whanau apply for grants, and if eligible, are assigned to a rōpū who supports the repair to their homes

[15] Habitat for Humanity Northern Region is one of four New Zealand affiliates of the international charity Habitat for Humanity that operates in over 70 countries worldwide. Habitat Northern operates across Auckland and Northland and has offices in South Auckland and Whangārei.

[16] The aim of the Healthy Home Initiative (HHI) is to increase the number of children living in warm, dry and healthy homes and to reduce avoidable hospitalisations and ill health due to housing-related conditions. The HHI was established in 2013 and is now delivered across the country by a range of providers and subcontracted providers, such as Māori Health, public health providers, housing and sustainability providers. See https://www.hhi.org.nz/

[17] 'Healthy Homes Initiative: Three-year outcomes evaluation'. A commissioned report evaluating the Healthy Homes Initiative. (2022). The evaluation looks at wider impact of healthy homes interventions – including on school attendance, employment and need for benefit support, and as such provides evidence supportive of our key messaging focused on decent homes as infrastructure for care, connection and contribution however the findings build on the findings of the 1-year and 3-year outcomes reports. See links below for an RNZ article on the 3-year report, and a link to the report itself:

Government celebrates Healthy Homes Initiative report | RNZ News
Healthy Homes Initiative: Three-year outcomes evaluation – Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora

[18] Severe housing deprivation is housing that lacks at least two of the three core dimensions of housing adequacy – habitability, security of tenure, and privacy and control – and is synonymous with homelessness.

[19] Following the Electricity Price Review (EPR) 2019 advisory panel's identification of energy hardship as a key issue, the then Labour Government established an independent Energy Hardship Expert Panel, and the Energy Hardship Reference Group in August 2021 to make recommendations on policy priorities and actions to alleviate energy hardship. The Panel's comprehensive consultation, research and analysis was presented in a July 2023 report, Te Kore, Te Pō, Te Ao Mārama, illuminating the various dimensions of energy hardship but also its recommendations to address them. With the change of Government the report has been shelved and is no longer considered under active consideration by the Government.

[20] The housing, energy and community sector network of CEN obtained the report through an OIA in March 2023.

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Success factors for planning regeneration in rural areas

Nick Taylor and Mike Mackay

Introduction

Regeneration in rural areas and regions is a complex, multi-dimensional process creating a range of impacts on community wellbeing. It takes time and effort to mobilise localised, sustainable, community-based developments, drawing on and extending the capacity of local communities and government (Stocker and Pollard, 1994; Powe et al., 2015). Social impact assessment can play an important part, especially when approached from a community base.

In Aotearoa New Zealand rural areas and regions face considerable obstacles to develop and thrive. An extended period of neo-liberal restructuring since the 1980s saw a re-focus of regional development with greater emphasis on the roles of local government, non-government organisations and rural communities (Nel, 2015). These local actions often face competing trajectories of development (Argent, 2011) especially around environmental and heritage impacts and their management.

Typically, successful community-based regeneration is based on a vision and plan inclusive of a broad representation of residents; as McMahon (2017, page 21) points out: "failing to plan simply means planning to fail". While there are plenty of failures in regeneration practice, often expending considerable time and external resources, the greatest successes are gained by initiatives shaped around existing assets and local capacity. However, community leaders and organisations often struggle to assess fully the problems they face and to plan responses. They need to know what constitutes successful regeneration: what works well and why.

By implication, local governments are key players in community-based change. Central government agencies and external stakeholder groups can also play an important part, but necessarily must consider shifting towards a bottom-up approach to support local initiatives and their leadership. The role of external agencies therefore becomes facilitative and focuses on being flexible and effective in delivering local services (Powe, et al., 2015).

A key finding from our research is the need to support community organisations and leadership throughout the project cycle, to co-produce knowledge about social impacts and wellbeing outcomes of actions taken, and to identify new opportunities for regeneration and social development. This approach requires SIA research on longer-term changes and emerging issues, with better-informed policy, regulation and plan making as a result. Refer to the Guidelines on Social Impact Assessment for Thriving Regions and Communities (Taylor and Mackay, 2022) to support communities with a practical approach to assessing and communicating the nature of social impacts of regeneration initiatives.

Lessons from the South Island

Our research into regeneration practices was focused on the Waitaki District in the South Island and is an output from the Thriving Regions (South Island) research theme of the Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities National Science Challenge (BBHTC) as reported by Mackay et al. (2018). The Waitaki research was part of a set of case studies focused on North Otago, Timaru and Ashburton to understand how settlements and communities might create positive futures for themselves (Perkins et al., 2019). By focusing on the Waitaki Valley, one of the largest catchments in the country, we gained insights into transformational changes in natural resource uses that directly affect the built environment and social wellbeing of regional towns (Ōamaru), smaller settlements and rural communities.

In the Waitaki we found a diverse geography where resource cycles are driving social and economic transitions. More specifically, we found there is a mix of regeneration activities at different stages in their life cycle, some being planned, others built, others operational, or under periodic maintenance, renewal, restructuring or closure. The resulting mosaic of economic and employment activity impacts social wellbeing outcomes that SIA research can then focus on (Mackay and Taylor, 2024). Our analysis set the scene for understanding place-based regeneration planning, implementation and impacts over a range of projects, using an SIA research framework as distinct from SIA applied to project planning.

Numerous factors can transform and impact regional towns and communities and these are evident in the Waitaki, the site of pastoral and irrigated farming alongside hydro-electricity development. They include new technologies and communications systems, viticulture, tourism development, amenity migration (people moving in for the available lifestyle and entrepreneurial opportunities), migration for work (including from overseas), new government policies, regulations, and the investment of local government in multiple initiatives. Along with the local council, communities look to respond to these changes and enhance their wellbeing through regeneration practices.

The research investigated and evaluated community-based and collaborative approaches to regional regeneration over two phases using participatory and action-research methods. Collaboration included a wide range of stakeholders across local government, local central government agencies, iwi, entrepreneurs, businesses, and community groups. Challenges examined have included sustainable tourism, heritage restoration, intensification of land uses, the positive integration of migrant workers and other newcomers, and affordable housing (Taylor and Mackay, 2024).

Community-based approaches

Community and place-based approaches to plan and implement sustainable initiatives are well established amongst regeneration practitioners and organisations since the 1980s (Pomeroy, 2019). SIA research helped us understand the capacity of the community to lead and adapt to future challenges, including climate change, losses of biodiversity, heritage, cultural values and social exclusion, through innovative leadership and local collaboration (Mackay and Taylor, 2024). An example is the Lower Waitaki Water Sports Park project, which showed how multiple uses of an irrigation system buffer pond for outdoor recreation evolved in several steps through the initiatives of farmers and other stakeholders, drawing on local leadership, philanthropy, and community-based efforts (Mackay and Perkins, 2019).

A community-based approach requires identification of a common and agreed set of community values and goals for change to achieve desired outcomes (Stocker and Pollard, 1994). It also requires the adoption of shared responsibilities and the joint application of available resources. Often the approach entails a place-based orientation to change as local geographies define the locus of change and the participants in regeneration (Fitzgerald, 1999). These places are complex and dynamic, with multifunctional economies experiencing periodic investment and dis-investment and frequent changes in national, regional, and local settings for policy and regulation.

Our research found regeneration at the community level encompasses strong participation and action elements to achieve sustainable outcomes. Success is based on communities, local councils and all stakeholders utilising frameworks for impact assessment, sustainability and community wellbeing at the strategic level (policy and planning) as well as for planning and implementing specific projects. Regeneration problems require stakeholders to work together with specific communities to enhance outcomes for social wellbeing, while sharing resources, building capacity, and then planning and implementing change.

Analysis of the Waitaki regeneration initiatives focused on heritage and ecological restoration efforts associated with hospitality and tourism: in the Ōamaru main street, waterfront and heritage area; along the Alps to Ocean (A2O) cycle trail; and for the Waitaki Aspiring Geopark (Mackay et al., 2019). A subsequent phase focused on the wellbeing of migrant worker groups and development of a district housing strategy.[1]

The Ōamaru waterfront and heritage areas

The Ōamaru waterfront and heritage areas encompass the Ōamaru harbour and wharves, a precinct of restored Victorian era heritage buildings and several outstanding, restored heritage buildings along the main street, including the Ōamaru Opera House, a heritage-listed building that is a strong presence in the main street leading into the Victorian precinct and waterfront areas. Waterfront developments add to the surrounding area, such as the redevelopment of Holmes Wharf (used by a small commercial fishing fleet, charter boats and recreational boats), the Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony facility and a waterfront restaurant. Multiple enterprises are now located in or adjacent to the precinct, using upgraded or new buildings including a commercial gym, a café, a bakery and a brew house.

Since a feasibility study back in 1987, Council strategic leadership and efforts of the Whitestone Civic Trust saw many buildings receive substantial investment, redevelopment, or repurposing. The area became a focus for diversifying the local economy, alongside efforts to protect heritage, hold cultural events, encourage the arts, enhance amenity values and outdoor recreation, and develop Ōamaru as a destination for domestic and international visitors.

Success factors in these initiatives include incremental change, where regeneration activity is a series of small steps over an open, extended time span. At the core was flexible, strategic planning and investment by the local Council, drawing on external expertise and resources such as heritage funding, while providing a framework for public, private and community investments and actions. It was also a community driven approach with diverse leadership and extensive voluntary inputs across multiple initiatives and opportunities building on local entrepreneurialism, commercial and individual benefactors, and considerable voluntary activity.

The Alps to Ocean (A2O) cycle trail and Waitaki Whitestone Geopark

The Ōamaru waterfront now forms the finishing point for the Alps to Ocean cycle trail (A2O) a 300km cycle trail that descends from the base of Aoraki Mt Cook through the Waitaki Valley. It passes through mountain landscapes, by hydro-electricity lakes and canals, along the braided-river system, and past geological and heritage features such as Māori rock art.

These features are promoted via the Waitaki Whitestone Global (UNESCO) Geopark, a further, visitor-focused regeneration initiative. The A2O links key geological features and interest points of the Geopark. The District Council developed the Geopark in collaboration with local voluntary organisations to showcase sites with geological interest and to promote local economic activity. Both the A2O and Geopark were led by enthusiastic local groups working alongside the Council, looking for positive impacts on employment and communities.

Our research (Mackay, et al., 2019) found that the A2O and the Geopark are indeed helping to diversify and revitalise the local economy. A feature of both initiatives is that they integrate and leverage regeneration actions across ecological restoration and heritage, such as new uses of buildings, wetlands and landscape restoration and conservation, and new businesses such as cafés and cycle operators. Council and community leaders achieved this integration through their planning and economic development officers, an economic development strategy co-designed in a Treaty-based partnership with Te Rūnanga o Moeraki, event management, a biodiversity fund and heritage protection, with resources allocated to support these activities and their positive impacts on people and communities.

The A2O initiative successfully drew on multiple funding sources, including Nga Haerenga/New Zealand Cycle Trail, two district councils (Mackenzie and Waitaki) and the Department of Conservation to plan and construct the trail. For the Geopark, the Council provided necessary resources and an official base for development of the geopark concept and its promotional uses, with the subsequent UNESCO application and an operative Geopark representing a collaboration between numerous organisations and individuals.

Locality-based relationships and social capital underlie these community-led initiatives with investments by central and local government adding to local capacity and skills. The A2O and Geopark attractions provide a focus for regeneration activity in small communities by entrepreneurial individuals and families, adding to local economies while building social capital and community resilience. A flexible approach means developments can link and scale up smaller developments to a district-wide strategy and, in the case of cycle trails, to a regional network.

Community leaders recognise there is an issue, however, with burgeoning visitor numbers at some sites such as Elephant Rocks and Moeraki Boulders testing the adaptive capacity of local communities and infrastructure, and requiring additional investment and management. A sustainable planning framework would assist by monitoring social impacts (for example, carrying capacity of sites, visitor satisfaction, local employment, community cohesion), and support future strategic and natural resource plans, and infrastructure investment.

The Waitaki District Housing Strategy

The Waitaki district housing strategy was the result of a collaborative, community-based Housing Taskforce convened by Stronger Waitaki, the networked community health and well-being agency. The research team used action research methods to help inform and facilitate the strategy process from 2019-24. The strategy addressed housing issues and needs, especially for migrant workers, elderly residents, those on low incomes, and youth entering the housing market.

Through surveys and workshops the strategy addressed the provision of short and longer-term social housing by the Council and other providers, transitional housing and discrimination in the housing market due to race, gender and age. Information workshops addressed the rights of landlords and tenants, and considered opportunities to advance financial literacy around home ownership. The condition, maintenance and warmth of housing was addressed through access to national funding programmes. Planning issues raised included the provision of new greenfield areas, and multiple use of heritage and commercial buildings. New planning rules around density should allow for urban intensification by the subdivision of larger sections with single dwellings, and fewer height restrictions.

Monitoring and evaluation are fundamental to an adaptive process for implementing the strategy - an integral part of the process of designing and implementing a change process, whether it be a project, strategy, policy or plan (Taylor and Mackay, 2023). The research team developed a monitoring and evaluation framework (spreadsheet) for the housing strategy in collaboration with Stronger Waitaki and the Taskforce. This framework was then used to help guide participants in preparing for their regular meeting and discussions about strategy progress. This framework is also important in providing consistency when new people join the Taskforce or as agency personnel change.

The housing strategy successfully drew on the valuable leadership of Stronger Waitaki, the Mayor, councillors and council planning staff. The strategy also included vital input from key stakeholders and the BBHTC research team in the Housing Taskforce, who participated by co-producing knowledge, and discussions during meetings and workshops. Research input assisted with a logical approach to developing and writing the strategy, through to assisting with implementation. As the strategy has addressed a complex social issue, it needs to be flexible and evolving during implementation. The Taskforce brought new information to the table as the strategy was developed, implemented and adapted. The ability to clarify and adapt the objectives and actions of the strategy over time is fundamental to success and necessitates ongoing co-production of knowledge, using an impact monitoring and evaluation framework (Taylor et al., 2019).

Success factors for planning regeneration

Success factors from across the Waitaki cases are consolidated in the Table below including from comparison with international regeneration experiences. They are presented as generic criteria for successful practice of community-based regeneration for use by communities when planning a regeneration initiative. Knowing what usually drives success can help in project development, implementation and evaluation - a basis for questions about what works well and why.

Criteria	Brief description
Sufficient time	Time allowed to build capacity, develop relationships, prepare strategies, plan and implement change
Tirirti based approach	A Tiriti-based approach with the time, resources, and space to develop relationships with Treaty partners
Clear governance	Governance established early in a change process with well-defined leadership and roles with sufficient independence from funders and agencies
Social capital	Opportunities taken to draw on and support social capital through locality-based relationships and diverse opportunities for leadership and volunteering
Strategic	Shared understanding of a problem to drive practical solutions through planning and collaboration using a strategic framework
Local benefit	An emphasis on regeneration that provides discernible benefits to locally agreed community outcomes and social wellbeing
Facilitative	Government agencies support regeneration with funding and expertise, so their approach is more facilitative than directive
Incremental change	A series of small steps utilise diverse financial resources, and available social entrepreneurialism and voluntary activity
Able to scale up	Regeneration initiatives are scaled up and integrated from several smaller developments
Flexible	Responses to complex, multidimensional problems of regeneration are flexible and evolve over time
Information led	Regeneration initiatives are based on sound data about issues, community needs and wellbeing outcomes
Commitment	Community leaders, organisations and groups commit initiatives and share their knowledge, expertise, and leadership skills
Inclusive	A broad range of stakeholders and community members, including vulnerable groups, participate throughout
Monitoring and evaluation	Implementation of an initiative is supported by active monitoring and evaluation with key indicators of success

The role of social impact assessment in regeneration initiatives

SIA can support community organisations to take a leadership role throughout the project cycle, using co-production of knowledge about social impacts. We argue for renewed attention to the importance of local knowledge in social impact assessment alongside secondary data, through an iterative mixed method approach (Taylor, et al., 2021). Commonly there will be a mix of operators, sector organisations, agencies of local, regional, iwi and central governments and community groups involved in this work to co-produce knowledge, designing and leading actions around new opportunities for regeneration and social development. The approach ideally will include a feedback loop to complete the project cycle through SIA research on longer-term changes and emerging issues, with better-informed policy, regulation and plan making as a result (Mackay and Taylor, 2024).

The antithesis to this approach is for local government and local agencies to rely on external sources of research, data and consultancies rather than build an internal ability to be part of a co-production approach. This building of local capacity in social analysis with iwi, the community and key stakeholders is key to co-production of knowledge at a local level. In respect to social aspects, co-production of knowledge requires jointly developing frameworks for assessment and evaluation, and theories of regional change that challenge current thinking. Here, we also acknowledge the importance of SIA Research (Mackay and Taylor, 2024) as reflected in the case studies we have discussed in this paper.

Conclusions

Community-based approaches to regeneration practice demonstrate the principles of collective action and the empowerment of community governance, leadership, organisations and individuals. Community development is an essential part of regeneration planning in rural and regional areas, entailing processes for community action such as building relationships, leadership, and sharing of information and resources (Caswell, 2001). Typically, community groups and local organisations identify the need for an intervention or set of interventions that enhance community wellbeing and then set out to share responsibilities for a strategy or plan and to undertake the necessary actions (Stocker and Pollard, 1994; Fitzgerald, 1999). To adopt this approach, community groups need the necessary skills, information and financial resources, broadly defined here as community capacity, to undertake SIA.

Powe et. al (2015) highlighted that to develop and implement a local strategy there must be a spirit of collaboration from the start. We add here that the co-production of knowledge is a feature of this effort to build local capacity in community-based SIA, especially in the areas of data collection and analysis.

Footnote

[1] Further details of these case studies and research results are available in a working paper at https://www.buildingbetter.nz/publication/what-makes-for-success-in-regeneration-initiatives-for-thriving-regions-final-working-paper-bbhtc-thriving-regions-waitaki-and-oamaru-case-study/

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