A summary of Pacific leaders' views on the *Fair Chance for all* interim report

Nine leaders from Pasifika organisations in Auckland were invited to a talanoa session to provide feedback on the *Fair chance for all* interim report. The session was held on 5 October 2022 and hosted at the Ministry for Pacific Peoples' offices in Manukau City. Participants attended in their personal capacities and had affiliations to the following organsiations: the Abuse in Care Inquiry, The Fono, Tōfa Mamao Collective, Pasifika GP Network, Pasifika Futures Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, Village Collective, The Cause Collective, Vaka Tautua.

We have summarised the feedback into themes that represent the views of Talanoa participants, which are not necessarily the views of the Commission, unless otherwise noted.

"Equity" does not always mean "equity for all"

Participants expressed concerns that equity for Pacific peoples is under-prioritised compared to other groups. They felt that the term "equity" is being misused — "let's not pretend it's equity for everyone".

Collectives and collectivism are crucial to a Pacific worldview and need to be embraced by all government agencies

Participants feel that trust for communities and ground-up initiatives is not expressed in the system. They explained that the success of community-led initiatives in Pacific communities during the COVID-19 vaccine rollout has not translated to an overall increased focus on building government partnerships at the community level. They feel that the return to status quo government operations fails to recognise the crucial role played by the "vitality of the collective" in these successes. "We have an ecosystem that makes the government look good. The vaccine rollout must be communicated as a success story that credits our community."

They believe it is crucial that the principle of collectivism be articulated in the Living Standards Framework as collectivism is a necessary element of wellbeing in the Pacific worldview.

Framework proliferation not adding value

Some participants expressed concerns about the lack of consistency between government agencies in their frameworks for measuring wellbeing, and the spending on the development of different frameworks and indicators without significantly progressing the discussion. There was discussion about that defining wellbeing at the central government organisational level was not always aligned to how it's defined at community and whānau levels.

Some participants questioned how wellbeing can be translated into something measurable, with which the government can (accurately) determine whether wellbeing is improving.

Overall participants questioned the applicability and implementation of these frameworks in a top-down fashion rather than in partnership with communities. Concern was also raised over the apparent lack of coordination of frameworks across agencies.

Measurement and ethics

Many of the community leaders expressed concerns about the efficacy and ethics of current data collection methods. They were concerned about the potential discrimination and exclusion of Pacific people in data collection. They specifically expressed concerns about:

Māori and Pasifika being placed in the same over-generalised category and with no allowance for specific Pacific ethnicities,

services that incentivise individuals who whakapapa to Māori *and* Pasifika to identify as one or the other was "doing a disservice" to communities. This single categorisation also distorts data,

accurate collection and classification of data is crucial in order to ensure ethical treatment of data narratives,

whether the Pacific worldview was strongly articulated in persistent disadvantage conceptual frameworks,

the need to promote a focus on "positive data" alongside negative perspectives and the overall move away from the deficit narrative — "not only [should we focus] on our youth who are not doing well, but also the majority that *are* doing well."

ensuring government data collection prioritises real impacts over "counting widgets" and that agencies take a partnership approach in order to ensure collection is justified, representative and not extractive,

whether the Crown was balancing its own responsibilities while listening to voices from the community regarding what they consider to be important to measure,

ensuring that the principle of collectivism is respected in data collection and analysis,

a lack of recognition that collective impact is more than the sum of the individual parts.

The Ministry of Pacific Peoples suggested that the soon to be finalised Long-term Insights Briefing they are working on, which looks at Pacific Data Equity, will highlight and provide responses to some of these issues.

Colonisation, capitalism and intergenerational disadvantage

There was discussion about the need to focus on intergenerational disadvantage, which "can be mapped directly to colonisation." It was noted that Pacific people have a particular experience in relation to colonisation in New Zealand, which differs from the Māori experience. The "modern-day slavery" of (RSE) Recognised Seasonal Employment programmes drive a unique treatment of this particular relationship.

It was suggested that Pacific people need to acknowledge that they were also colonised – not in the same way as Māori, but religion and education were tools of colonisation/assimilation. Pacific people need to recognise that and need to decolonise themselves.

"Priority has an effect"—the productive conversations had between Māori and the Crown, the result of "Māori never [stopping] fighting for their rights," are bearing fruit and illustrating that "wellbeing is when you thrive, brought up in your own culture" and suggesting that "something [similar] has to happen with the Pacific soon."

Those present believed that the focus on colonisation was necessary, but perhaps a greater focus on capitalism at a fundamental level is necessary, particularly its orientation towards the individual at the expense of the community. There was general agreement that until we resolve that, we will just be tinkering and won't solve the issue. This point was stressed at various parts of the discussion.

Many expressed optimism that young people coming through now have a different world view. Participants expressed support for the Commission's coverage of colonisation and related issues in the inquiry's interim report.

Lack of opportunities and low expectations

Some participants spoke about the need to focus on opportunities, and that a lack of opportunities was a key barrier to prosperity. They spoke about how the education system is not built for the needs of Pacific communities and low expectations are engrained and compounded across generations. They noted that bottom-up initiatives aimed at combatting these issues have some success, but too often they become a political football and the fodder of those higher up in the funding chain. They concluded that only so much can be done at the bottom; "change needs to come from higher up."

The group supported the interim report's idea that income is just one small component of disadvantage.

They want to see an approach that prioritises "cooperation over competition."

System barriers, system shifts

Ganesh Nana (Chair of Productivity Commission) offered that "colonial origins have given us the system we have today. But how do people of the modern Pacific nation of Aotearoa perceive accountability? The intergenerational approach is not accounted for in decision making, and there is a lot of discussion around political goals. Collective goal-setting is eroded by short-termism, power dynamics and the public appetite for constant change. The threat of funding removal and "pass-fail" style approaches prevent system learning and improvement. How could we achieve [the necessary shifts]?"

One participant commented that "there are issues around co-design and partnership relationships, which were strengths during the COVID period and one of the reasons for success. Now that things are returning to the status quo, could the system shifts incorporate incentives for these kinds of partnerships? Also, at a higher level, they could be made more visible in regulatory reforms?"

They also suggested that we must also consider a reform of the procurement mechanisms, and the individual input/output nature of contracting — "it is incredibly challening for those who are seeking through programmes and intiatives, outcomes shifts."

Commitment to change lacking

Many commented that the commitment to change was missing at the top [of government and the public service].

"We require change at the top level to create a cross-governmental commitment to change… it must trickle down from the top… in my experience we have lacked that change… it doesn't trickle down from the middle, it must come from the top. A lot of investment has gone into 'doing things differently'—a lot of similar conversations, changes to commissioning, but the commitment to change at the top isn't there."

"Mid-level officials come in saying things must change, but then each agency has a different approach to making the change. Each agency comes to the table with a different agenda."

One participant explained this lack of commitment to change in reference to Whānau Ora Commissioning., saying that this is an example of the potential for individual agencies to overcome short-termism at lower levels; "we pay people in advance, [and] have four-year contracts." The Ministry of Health disrupts this in its "bias towards its own providers," "sees provider sector as being in competition with them" despite its role "not to provide services but [to manage] policy. The Crown isn't constrained in the way it can commission—Whānau Ora illustrates that. They just choose not to do more of it."

Others spoke about the need to have different people at the top. "Deliberate disruptive change" is needed. "You can't have the same people at the top who have been making decisions—the original architects are still there, and this is a real issue. There is no shift right up at the top, and that needs to change."

Mental health policy was given as an example; "the people designing the systems today are the same as those 30 years ago. Ministers will change but bureaucrats won't."

There was also discussion about the system needing a shift in mindset. "If policies and regulatory frameworks don't reflect the people they serve, it's a massive injustice. People [in the public sector] feel stuck by the Public Finance Act, and that the Public Service Act is telling people how to behave. But we are the people, we are the system, we are the money"—this ought to translate to public management but is constrained by risk aversion.

"The fundamental question for our community is what value does the Government put on the Pacific community, the Pacific worldview? If you value something, what is the distance you're prepared to go [for it]?" "The 'how' of getting there is wrong".

There was discussion about the urgency of making changes. "There is some urgency here—it would be such a missed opportunity for a country not to step into this space and not to embrace indigeneity of the Pacific [rather than sticking with the Eurocentric worldview], it would be such a loss to not show the world what that looks like."

Agencies don't want to give up their power

It was noted by participants that: "agencies don't want to give up their power. They want to have intimate, tight control over everything because they think that way it will be better. The solution is to get the money further from the centre and closer to the people who use the services."

Another suggested that sometimes inter-agency collaboration can perpetuate and strengthen system barriers: "agencies buddying up makes it worse."

Some participants commented that service providers struggle to compete with government salaries to retain their staff. They explained that for the NGO sector, staff salaries are generally benchmarked

against government agencies and the levels of salaries are making it hard for NGOs to recruit qualified high performing staff due to salary expectations.

Communities must be trusted, and the public sector needs to reflect our communities

The group strongly agreed that Pacific communities have "established ecosystems" which must be treated as credible and not dictated to - the community wants to put forward its own ideas. They elaborated that this is tied to the issue of not always having a seat at the table, particularly representation *within* Crown and government entities. "The critical thing is people. We have a public sector that does not reflect our community, and this is spread throughout all levels—unless you have people at the table at all levels, co-design is ineffective."

 "Part of the system is broken—there's the idea in Wellington that the mainstream can deal with Māori and Pacific interests better than the communities themselves. Funding is then channelled accordingly, but we don't see the same impacts of funding in the communities. We are being colonised by mainstream organisations."

They made a final plea to put more emphasis in the final report on the Pacific perspective: "Got to give more than one line about Pacific – add more detail on this – we're always at the risk of being diluted – don't do that to us."