

# Take a Community-led Approach to Achieve Government Objectives

Advice to Ministers  
November 2017

Traditional government ways of fixing social, economic and environmental problems need to change. This Government has a unique opportunity to create sustainable change by supporting people and communities to shape the solutions that affect them. Expanding their capacity to take action will achieve more tailored, integrated and cost effective outcomes.

*Community-led development is a way of working together in a place to create and achieve locally owned visions and goals*

Inspiring Communities (IC) is an NGO with comprehensive knowledge of how community-led approaches trigger new ways of working that better achieve effective, sustainable change. We are dedicated to growing the capacity of agencies and communities to work together to address social, environmental and economic disparities. Our experience tells the time is right to build a new approach – one that connects and leverages the existing local wisdom in many communities across New Zealand. One that also lies at the heart of wellbeing economics.

## Here's two examples where this approach is already being applied:

Linking regional economic growth and social wellbeing – IC has worked alongside the Ōpōtiki community as they create transformative change leading to new industry, infrastructure and jobs for local people. (appendix one)

Child Rich Communities – An IC brokered partnership with UNICEF, Plunket, and Every Child Counts has profiled and learnt from initiatives across a wide range of communities integrating social services and community-led development to tackle child poverty and enhance child wellbeing. We have plans to expand this.

## What's required:

**Government acting as a partner, enabler and co-host, rather than prescribing from the top.**

**Supporting innovative leadership from Government (Central and Local) and communities.**

**Ensuring regional development incorporates investment in community-capacity building, alongside hard infrastructure.**

**Reforming public policy process to increase flexibility for communities to be active, supported and resourced to define what issues they wish to address and how they intend to do it.**

**Repackaging the Social Investment Agency as a resource hub for agencies, places and people working towards more holistic solutions. (appendix three)**

**Inspiring Communities can support the Government to effect transformational change. We are best placed to provide expertise on how to design and implement community – led development approaches alongside other policy levers and investment.**



## Working in partnership with Inspiring Communities

### Government can:

- Co-design policy that enables communities and regions to act, organise and grow their capability
- Expand engagement with the people that are the focus of policy settings but are often not consulted
- Grow the capacity of the public sector to add value to the potential of local communities
- Support a shift from measuring economic production to valuing and investing in community wellbeing.

Our five core principles of community-led development should guide this process.<sup>1</sup>

**1. Shared local visions drive action and change.**

**2. Use existing strengths and assets.**

**3. Many people, groups and sectors working together.**

**4. Build diverse and collaborative local leadership.**

**5. Working adaptively, learning informs planning and action.**

1. For detailed explanation of these principles see appendix two

People are tired of being done ‘to’. Addressing complex challenges works best using an adaptive rather than a ‘cookie cutter’ approach. Community-led development shifts from narrow, linear definitions of the causes of poor outcomes, to understanding the complex environment of dynamic and inter-related factors that contribute to these outcomes.

### By applying these principles we have found that:

- **A community-led approach is more effective because...** it leverages the knowledge of local experience and relationships to understand how systems can be improved. This ensures tailored approaches that build on the unique issues and assets in each community. It allows individuals and communities to gain insights into their needs and how to best address them.
- **A community-led approach is more efficient because...** it taps into a range of other resources in the community, so actual level of investment (through time, capability and finances) can be greater than the spending by government alone.
- **A community-led approach is more enduring because...** it provides sustainability beyond initial investment period, by engaging the support of local leaders and organisations, and often other funding sources. It also creates a broader constituency of support, trust based relationships and cultivates local ownership and long term commitment to change.
- **A community-led approach generates a wider range of wellbeing benefits because...** it is not just about individual success or narrowly defined issues. It is collaborative, with the people and communities requiring the change being active in all the stages, including co-designing solutions. This in turn grows social capital and community resilience.

*Our communities have knowledge, strengths and assets that they can and are collectively building on to improve our lives. We need to do more to foster and support communities.*

Community-led change is a journey – it takes time, skill and trust. We urge the new Labour-led Government to be brave and trust communities to understand what will work for them. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you to progress how community-led development can be the building block to greater citizen participation and grow wellbeing for all New Zealanders.

**For more about us visit: [www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz](http://www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz)**

# Ōpōtiki using their taonga to harbour a dream



Decades ago, some Whakatōhea kaumatua advocated farming the sea, and rebuilding the marine based economy which the Iwi had been renowned for pre-confiscation. At the time there was scepticism – maybe the vision seemed impossible...

Ōpōtiki now has the largest offshore marine farm in New Zealand and local iwi, Te Whakatōhea is the majority shareholder. Over the past 20 years Te Whakatōhea and partners have co invested in research and farming infrastructure to harvest spat and grow mussels. Both are now being produced at extraordinary rates.

Now it's time to develop the Ōpōtiki Harbour so that both the farm can be serviced and the mussels processed locally – generating local jobs and wealth. Regional commitment to investment is lined up, awaiting government commitment so that construction can commence.

Ōpōtiki was once considered one of New Zealand's most deprived communities. It's had heavy unemployment, decreases in population, and a large dependence on government benefits. Increasingly both locals and outsiders are perceiving it differently. They're realising benefits plus seasonal work need no longer be the only option for some.

Through their joint leadership, Te Whakatōhea and the Ōpōtiki District Council have integrated iwi and community-led development approaches to empower their community's transformation.

**Shared local visions drive action and change** – Ōpōtiki had a desire for change, they envisioned a community that could be more sustainable: Iwi saw opportunity for economic growth congruent with their values and aspirations; the Council saw potential in a sustainable seafood industry, along with other industries enabled by a viable harbour – all supporting the community's wider vision for change.

**Using existing strengths and assets** – Te Whakatōhea has a strong connection to the sea – traditionally known as enterprising seafarers and coastal traders.

The community saw their vision as an asset, one of great value in rebuilding a vibrant local economy and wellbeing. Layered over this was Ōpōtiki harbour. In European settlement times it was thriving – a connection to both European and Māori heritage.

**Many people groups and sectors working together** –

Te Whakatōhea, settled on their vision to develop the marine farm, reached out to multiple groups and organisations to assist. Ōpōtiki District Council with community support got behind the initiative, taking leadership to develop the Harbour. Both developments have been complex processes including community, iwi, multiple central and local government layers, scientists, researchers, investors and a wide range of businesses. There's been effort regionally, nationally and internationally over many years and that's created more relationships and trading opportunities both here and overseas.

The Ōpōtiki Marine Advisory Group has been a constant thread at the local level, bringing Council, Te Whakatōhea, marine farm leadership and other business people, to the table, along with funders, the regional council and economic development agency.

**Working adaptively, learning informs planning and action** –

Over the decades of persistence, patches of progress have been frequently interrupted by knock- backs and road- blocks. Two things stand out. One is a collective determination to keep going, learning from experience and adapting to new circumstances and ideas. The other is the value of diverse skills, knowledge and leadership skills around the tables driving these projects, which means different people and organisations can step up when leadership is needed, and then step back as new challenges and opportunities emerge, demanding other expertise.

# Community-led Development *principles*

Community-led Development is working together to create and achieve locally-owned visions and goals. It's a place-based development approach that's built around five core practice principles.

## 5 principles ...

### 1 Shared local visions drive action and change.

- Building visions and priorities with those who live, work, care, play, and invest in that place – the principle of ahi kaa<sup>1</sup>.
- Tailor-making solutions from the 'ground up' and reflecting local aspirations, needs and conditions.
- Growing a shared sense of optimism and collective caring for people, place and the future ahead.

### 2 Using existing strengths and assets.

- Acknowledging everyone has a contribution to make – with attention to involve groups often ignored.
- Valuing local people as 'experts' in their place.
- Proactively engaging local voices and ideas.
- Building action plans built on existing community strengths, assets and resources.
- Encouraging and supporting local people with energy to do things, and connecting them up with others who can help.

### 3 Many people, groups and sectors working together.

- Involving all those who have a stake in creating visions and aspirations, plans and activities and working/doing together.
- Fostering new connections between diverse people, organisations and sectors to unlock resources and enable new thinking.
- Creating strong local relationships and linkages – at street/ neighbourhood level, between local groups, agencies, businesses and also with organisations based outside the local area.

### 4 Building diverse and collaborative local leadership.

- Intentionally strengthening, growing and joining up local leadership.
- Recognising and celebrating local leadership and achievements.
- Making change visible and communicating progress within communities.

### 5 Working adaptively, learning informs planning and action.

- Holding an intentional vision/goal with a flexible 'doing' framework.
- Not waiting for the 'perfect' plan or 'complete' analysis – they don't exist.
- Being prepared to take action, acknowledging uncertainty and adapting as things progress.
- Proactively sharing experiences, learnings, and results within and across communities.
- Understanding that ongoing small steps collectively contribute to larger transformational change.
- Making links and encouraging systems changes (policy, funding, practice etc) for lasting impact within communities.

<sup>1</sup>Ahi Kaa is a fundamental traditional Māori cultural concept meaning 'site of burning fires'. In contemporary times, Ahi Kaa is used to refer to people who uphold a particular purpose within the community. That is, they are the 'keepers of the home fires' be that at home, on the marae or within a particular organisation or movement.

# Social Investment in New Zealand

## Commentary from a community-led development perspective

Donna Provoost



There is much to applaud about taking a social investment approach – investing in critical areas and issues now to support better outcomes, and lead to less remedial spending in the long term. Government agencies are using this language to frame the current efforts to get better value for money both in the short and long term from the government’s social sector spend.

Better use of integrated data sets has provided a new lever for social investment, identifying the relative importance of certain risk factors in leading to poor outcomes for individuals and correlation between factors. The data provides the evidence behind the story of multiple-disadvantage that some New Zealanders face. The data also highlights that the present interventions are not working for a significant number of these people. Using this data, a social investment approach seeks to enable better outcomes by supporting these individuals on their personal journey, by investing in evidence-based interventions related to defined risk factors

But is that enough? And is that what social investment means?

We have heard a range of views and critiques of this approach as it is being implemented through recent round tables on social investment in New Zealand.

**We believe in all the discussion, three additional points need to be heard:**

- **the narrow definition of ‘evidence’ being used may not be telling the full story of ‘what works’**
- **social investment means investing in the society and communities – not just individuals**
- **the initiatives under the social investment umbrella do not have a social theory of change to guide them.**

*This commentary was published in April 2017 it discusses a community-led development and community change perspective.*





## Let's ask 'What else works?'

The traditional evidence – such as randomised control trials, systematic reviews of treatment approaches, or analysis of system level data – may not be telling the full story of 'what works'. Using this evidence as the basis for purchasing interventions for those with multiple-disadvantage may be missing some critical information.

Using these traditional evidence sources tell us that universal approaches do work for some people, some of the time. To get a more nuanced picture, the way we make sense of data needs to change. Rather than asking 'what works', the question shifts to 'what is going to work for this person (or group) now'. This shifts the focus to understanding how the system can be improved to ensure people receive the right service at the right time. To answer this question, we need to have input from the person or group seeking the change to define what success will look like and to assess what is working for them. In this way, the clients become the key drivers of the change process.

Including this type of qualitative and client-provided information broadens the focus to 'how' alongside 'what works'. It is already used in many approaches, for example, community-led development, solutions focused therapy, co-design thinking, narrative theory and Partners for Change Outcome Management System (PCOMS), to name a few.

While data and statistics are part of the story, they cannot be a substitute for listening to the actual experience of individuals and communities on whether the initiative was contributing to positive change. Asking how clients and communities view success is also important, provides a much more nuanced story, and by asking, engages them in the process.

## What is social investment, really?

The current discussions consistently state social investment is about changing outcomes for disadvantaged individuals. The discussions even acknowledge that any intervention for an individual takes place in a highly complex environment. This is even referred to as the 'eco-system' that individuals and their interactions with services occur.

Actually, this environment is the community. If we want social investment to make a difference, we need to appreciate the relationship between individuals and communities. And we need to invest in the environment not just certain individuals.

While investing in programmes or services that support the individual to achieve a better outcome will have a social return if that means saving later, this alone is not social investment. Social investment must include investing in the infrastructure and human capital that provides an enabling environment, as well as funding the interventions targeted at individuals.

## What is the theory of change in a complex system?

Social investment is when you invest today so that your costs and spending in future are reduced while the wellbeing of the society increases. Some of the current spending must then be invested in building the empowering environment in the community, alongside individual treatment elements.

Most of the papers and discussions to date do not address this theory of change underpinning social investment. To contribute to the broader understanding of these change processes, Inspiring Communities begun to dispel some of the mystery of 'what happens in the black box' that translates social investment into social return. That is, from a community-led development approach, how government investment in the capacity of the community strengthens social connections necessary for improving social wellbeing.

The Inspiring Communities Theory of Change begins with the belief that local capacity is a critical ingredient to positive change. Valuing and engaging the local community perspectives, and helping support and engage them in determining the change they are seeking are essential to accelerate effective change. The change process unfolds over time, beginning with strengthening loose social connections in many communities. Through sound application of community-led development principles local leadership is formed and local capacity is strengthened – building capacity to act, capacity to organise and capacity to collaborate. Effective community-wide change has the potential to impact on 'at risk' individuals, by reducing the risk of stigmatising certain people or families as they choose to reflect the emerging norms. It can transform a community and provide the environment where individual change is possible, wellbeing increases and positive social returns can be realised.