

Policy for Maori: values, assumptions and closing the gap

Michelle Levy

Senior Policy Analyst, Te Puni Kōkiri

Overall the evidence in this report does not provide assurance that the economic and social gaps between Maori and non-Maori are closing. Of greater concern is that the statistics do not provide any signals that there is an impending change in the situation (Te Puni Kōkiri, 1998)

This paper looks at the issue of what it is about the way in which policy is developed which influences whether or not policy meets the needs of Maori. To do this I will focus on one component of policy making; the role of the values and assumptions of policy makers. Assumptions about the nature of policy making and the way in which policy can be used to maintain and modify norms and standards, determine values and define problems are briefly investigated. These issues are highlighted using the Code of Family and Social Responsibility as an example of the way in which dominant cultural value bases and assumptions have influenced the way in which policy issues are framed and presented. The paper concludes by asking why the consideration of the values of policy makers is important for Maori and how can I, as a Maori policy analyst working within the Government policy making sector, contribute to the development of policy which is based on Maori assumptions, realities, values and world views.

The key question this paper seeks to answer is: What is it about the way in which policy is developed that influences whether or not policy meets the needs of Maori? This paper has been developed from my observations as a policy analyst in the Social Policy Branch of Te Puni Kōkiri for the past two years. It is important to be aware of the particular context which surrounds my observations in this area and of the particular role I have had within the policy making sector. To do this I provide some background information that includes an overview of the state sector, Te Puni Kōkiri and its role, and my specific role within this organisation. I then look at the policy context for Maori, before moving on to look at values, assumptions and the policy world.

It is important to acknowledge that the views expressed in this paper are my personal views and are not the official views of Te Puni Kōkiri.

Te Puni Kōkiri and the state sector

To understand the present role of Te Puni Kōkiri it is necessary to look back to its origins. The former Department of Maori Affairs had its origins in institutions set up to facilitate the transfer of land to the colonists.

However, by the mid-1970's the main task of the Department was the delivery of services to promote Maori social and economic advancement. There was no role for the Department in the development of Government policy, and as such no established process for Maori involvement in decision making. A State Services Commission review in 1977 found that the Department was unresponsive to the people it was meant to serve. Between then and 1990 many changes occurred with the establishment of Manatū Maori and the Iwi Transition Agency, their subsequent dis-establishment and the establishment of Te Puni Kōkiri in 1991.

Te Puni Kōkiri was established under the policy of mainstreaming. This is the policy of delivering services to Maori through mainstream agencies which serve the general population, instead of through a specialist Maori agency such as the former Department of Maori Affairs. For the Government, the objectives of mainstreaming are to become more effective in delivering services to Maori; reduce the duplication of service provision; and ensure that Maori have better access to existing programmes.

Essentially, the establishment of Te Puni Kokiri represented a move away from a focus on direct service provision, towards a focus on the provision of policy advice to the Minister of Maori Affairs and other agencies concerned with Maori development. Te Puni Kokiri has followed a path from that of an agency which carries out and delivers government policy to that of one which designs and enhances Government policies. Under the policy of mainstreaming, primary responsibility for the well-being of Maori rests collectively with the state sector. As a consequence of the mainstreaming policy Vote: Maori Affairs was reduced by \$212m. Of this, \$97.9m was transferred to mainstream agencies. The remaining \$114.5m was retained by the government as savings.

In 1994 a State Services Review confirmed Te Puni Kokiri as the Crown's principal advisor on the Crown's relationship with iwi, hapu and Maori and key government policies as they affect Maori. In line with government priorities, Te Puni Kokiri provides policy advice which addresses the main adverse social and economic outcomes that affect Maori, investigates the linkages between those outcomes, and provides advice on Treaty of Waitangi settlement issues including those of mandate, consultation and representation. In all of these activities Te Puni Kokiri is expected to establish effective and efficient liaison with other Government agencies which provide advice on Maori policy.

Specific areas in which policy advice is undertaken includes:

- education;
- training;
- health;
- income;
- employment;
- interventions and strategies to improve Maori social and economic outcomes;
- issues arising out of the relationship between Maori and the Crown;
- Maori Trust Boards, incorporations and other Maori business entities;

- the delivery of mainstream services to Maori; and
- the administration of legislation for which the Ministry is responsible.

The Social Policy Branch in Te Puni Kokiri has a focus on adding value in the Government's policy development process. Whilst mainstream departments have the lead responsibility for their respective sectoral areas, the Branch has a special responsibility to advise on all issues affecting Maori socio-economic disadvantage and development. The Branch has a crucial role in the development of the work plans and policy programmes of mainstream ministries and departments, who have primary responsibility for Maori policy development.

The Branch seeks to improve Maori outcomes through mainstream mechanisms by encouraging improved responsiveness. In general, the Branch is involved at all stages of the policy development cycle, except delivery. It should be pro-active in the formulation of policy frameworks, and in linking policy to implementation through operational frameworks. This means working with other ministries or policy units which set policy frameworks, and also with those developing policy implementation guidelines. The Branch also works to enhance participation to ensure that iwi, hapu and Maori entities such as Maori providers or runanga are able to have a voice in improving Maori outcomes. The critical issue for the Branch is that it must find ways to work alongside mainstream departments who are responsible for improving Maori outcomes, but who have not been effective in doing so. Some mainstream policies inadequately take account of Maori at the policy formulation stage and others fail at implementation.

As stated above the Social Policy Branch works across a wide range of sectors. There are three portfolios within the Branch – Strategic Alliances, Maori Potential and State Sector Responsiveness. I am based in the State Sector Responsiveness portfolio where I undertake work in a variety of different sectors. Examples of the diverse areas of

work which I have been involved in include health policy, intersectoral policy, justice policy, family violence policy, strengthening families and youth development policies. In all of these areas I have been required to work towards ensuring the policies and work being undertaken include a focus on policy responsiveness to Maori.

The policy context and Maori – setting the scene

There are a number of tools which clearly set a context in terms of the need for policy development to be responsive to Maori. Two which are described below are the Government's overarching goals and strategic priorities and Te Puni Kokiri's (1998) publication *Progress Towards Closing Social and Economic Gaps Between Maori and Non-Maori*.

Overarching goals and strategic priorities:

The Government has seven overarching goals and ten strategic priorities which indicate the Government's strategic direction from 1999 to 2002 and provide the broad parameters for specific policy making.

Two overarching goals are:

We want to focus our social assistance in welfare and housing on those most in need; making a difference by breaking cycles of disadvantage. We want to reduce the number of New Zealanders who need to rely on welfare. We will support individuals and families taking responsibility for their well-being; and our assistance will be focused so that we are not using high taxes to support high income New Zealanders

Recognising the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi, we will ensure that through Government's policies and actions we continue in good faith to build relationships between the Crown and Maori. In order to achieve this, we are committed to continuing the significant progress already made in negotiating and implementing fair, durable and affordable settlements of historical grievances; and improving the social and economic status of Maori (New Zealand Government, 1999)

Stemming from these overarching goals are strategic priorities. Of primary relevance to

Maori and social policy development is the following strategic priority nine:

significantly improve the health, employment, education and housing status of Maori by ensuring better targeting and delivery of services (New Zealand Government, 1999).

These goals and priorities provide a frame of reference for those in the Public Service. The strategic priorities are intended to shape departmental work plans and budgets and are a key element in the accountability of departmental chief executives to their ministers. The use of this accountability mechanism, in terms of requiring the key result areas of government agencies to be aligned with the overarching goals and strategic priorities, is intended to enable the government to ensure that its strategic priorities are turned into policy and programmes for action.

Closing the Gaps: This report is the second tool which can be used to establish a policy context for Maori. Its purpose was to examine the progress being made in closing the economic and social gaps between Maori and non-Maori. The findings in the report are not new and show that Maori experience poorer educational outcomes, higher unemployment, lower income levels, lower rates of home ownership and poorer health than non-Maori. What was new in this report was the ability to show across the sectors whether disparities were improving, remaining static or getting worse. In brief, what this report showed was that in terms of economic status, levels of Maori self employment and income have increased over the past decade. However, housing has become less affordable and Maori are still more reliant on social welfare assistance than non-Maori. In terms of health status, over the past decade there have been continued improvements in Maori life expectancy and declines in infant mortality. In spite of this, for almost every other health indicator reviewed in the *Closing the Gaps* report Maori continue to lag behind non-Maori.

Overall the evidence in this report does not provide assurance that the economic and

social gaps between Maori and non-Maori are closing. Of greater concern is that the statistics do not provide any signals that there is an impending change in the situation (Te Puni Kokiri, 1998).

Why is this? We have Government's overarching goals and strategic priorities which direct agencies to develop policy solutions to address these issues. We have data which indicates that Maori continue to show clear disparities in a range of areas including unemployment, health and education. We have agencies and programmes and a whole industry of policy makers working to develop solutions in an attempt to address the issue of Maori disparities. Have these been effective in meeting the needs of Maori? The evidence in the *Gaps* report would indicate no. If we accept that policies don't appear to be meeting Maori needs, the next step is to ask why not?

There is of course no single answer. Rather a wide range of complex, diverse and interconnecting views and perspectives. This paper seeks to complete one piece of the puzzle by asking what is it about the way in which policy is developed which influences whether or not the policy developed will meet the needs of Maori?

Assumptions, values and the policy world

One of the most deeply entrenched assumptions in policy making is the notion that the policy environment as a whole is neutral and objective and that analysts are uninfluenced by wider issues which characterise the environment.

Buhrs and Bartlett (1993) provide an account of some of the assumptions underpinning much of the thinking about the policy world:

- politics is about problem solving
- policy making is synonymous with decision making
- policy making is concerned with end results
- rationality is purely intellectual

- the theoretical and empirical knowledge which is available is reliable

These assumptions and modern approaches to policy making and analysis appear to be based on positivism, or the scientific method, which basically seeks to discover universal truths which are believed to hold true across differing times, places, historical and social contexts. A widely accepted and idealised policy process follows a path like this:

- Issue identification
- Identifying affected parties
- Consultation
- Analysis
- Choosing the options
- Legislative process (if necessary)
- Implementation
- Monitoring and review
- Policy maintenance

As shown in the model above, the positivist model presumes that policy making begins with a definable problem: that is, the empirical identification of the existence of a problem. It is assumed to be very straight forward from there, as within the process analysts move to formulate goals and objectives that lead to optimal solutions, determine relevant consequences and probabilities of alternative means to the solution, assign a value-numerical cost or benefit to each consequence, and combine the information about consequences, probabilities, costs and benefits to select the most effective and efficient alternative (Fischer, 1995).

All very straight forward one could argue. However, a number of writers have offered an alternative view of policymaking: a struggle over ideas, a process of argument and persuasion, maintaining and modifying norms and standards over time, and a means for determining values and defining problems. According to Buhrs and Bartlett (1993):

- politics is about communication, power, moral action and the construction of preferences, values and meanings

- problems are not solved and at best they are usually only ameliorated, resolved or more typically redefined
- empirical knowledge is always incomplete and the information which is available is never wholly reliable or unbiased

Fisher and Forester (1987) describe an “expressive dimension” of policy making. They contend that policies say as well as do things. Policies don’t only aim to alter behaviour, they also aim to strategically communicate values and intentions and distribute symbolic rewards. These symbolic rewards communicate rightness of causes and they reward individual groups with legitimacy and attention. This is even if they fail to do little to actually address the problems or have very little to do with encouraging certain outcomes.

The expressive dimension of policy is often based on assumptions and value judgements which are assigned to the key players prior to policy development. What this means is that policy makers hold assumptions considered to be true regarding what is good or bad, right or wrong. These assumptions, considered to be true, are held independently of experience of the subject matter, without consideration being given to the basis on which these assumptions have been reached (Healey, 1993). The presence of an expressive dimension based on a priori assumptions has major implications for the way in which issues are framed and presented, and subsequently for the policies which are developed.

The Code of Family and Social Responsibility

Below I look at the assumptions about the nature of policy making and briefly examine the way in which policy can be used as a tool to maintain and modify norms and standards, determine values and define problems. I do this using the *Code of Family and Social Responsibility* as an example of the way in which particular value bases and assumptions

have influenced the way in which policy issues are framed and presented.

The *Code* was a questionnaire which was distributed to every household in New Zealand in February 1998. It examined a wide range of issues such as looking after our children; pregnancy care; keeping children healthy; pre-school education; getting children to school ready to learn; young offenders; sharing parenthood; training and learning for employment; work obligations and income support; managing money; and keeping ourselves healthy.

A general analysis of the questions contained in the *Code* clearly reveal the presence of several key assumptions about what was considered to be good or bad and right or wrong in New Zealand families and society in general. These assumptions include:

- the nuclear family is the norm
- beneficiaries are not responsible parents
- beneficiaries cannot manage their money
- only children of beneficiaries are truants
- only children of beneficiaries commit crimes
- it is always desirable for children to have contact with both parents
- women will always have the support of a partner available to them when they are pregnant
- people with mental health problems have the ability to seek help when they require mental health care
- employment is available to people if they are prepared to look for it.

In the context of the discussion above regarding the expressive dimension, the importance of the *Code* can be seen as lying less in the options it offers for changing behaviours and more in the way it communicates a certain set of values. The *Code* overtly conveyed that rightness of causes and certain ways of thinking are to be encouraged, particularly in terms of the “tax payers” right to hold certain beliefs and to expect certain conducts of behaviour from beneficiaries. The expressive dimension of this work is clearly based on assumptions of

what is considered to be right and wrong. Equally clear is that these assumptions have been developed to support particular cultural and theoretical positions with the aim of setting and maintaining norms, constructing values and defining problems. The implications of the expressive dimension are important because of the influence they have on the policies and policy solutions which will be developed. The *Code* highlights this very well in terms of the potential negative impacts for Maori of policy solutions proposed on the basis of individualistic assumptions and values about the welfare, health and justice systems.

To emphasise this influence I would like to look at two specific examples from the *Code of Family and Social Responsibility* and the ways in which policy responses can differ based on differing assumptions and values.

The *Code* asked the New Zealand public about issues relating to the health and welfare of pregnant women and children. In what ways would policy solutions to the issues of pregnant women receiving regular antenatal care, parents keeping their children healthy and parents ensuring their children attend school look like if they were based on different values and assumptions? What different questions could be asked if we spoke from a perspective founded on recognising complex interrelationships between a range of factors, as opposed to speaking from a perspective which explains behaviour and issues solely in terms of individual responsibility? Here are some possible suggestions to the questions highlighted above.

The *Code* stated that:

Pregnant women will protect their own and their baby's health with the support of their partner. They will begin regular visits to a doctor or midwife early in pregnancy.

The question is then posed:

Should the Government use the contact it has with women receiving pregnancy related sickness benefit to encourage good care during pregnancy, e.g. to check that they have sought proper care?

We know that maternity and infant health issues have a major impact on the well being of Maori whanau. Problems associated with pregnancy, birth and premature deliveries suggest that an increased focus on well-being and antenatal education for Maori is required. Maori are both potentially significant consumers of early maternity services and providers of culturally relevant antenatal services. The empowerment of Maori women and whanau to take control of Maori antenatal health, both at a personal and a collective level, should be a key component of a Government's strategic policy direction in relation to maternity care. Some ways this can be achieved by are:

- determining why existing mainstream antenatal services are failing to produce positive outcomes for Maori;
- consulting Maori in regard to the development of alternative Maori provider maternity initiatives;
- supporting and fostering the expansion of existing Maori maternity care and well child services.

How different are these potential solutions to the one proposed in the *Code*, that the Government use its contact with women on pregnancy related sickness benefits to ensure pregnant women receive adequate health care? You can see the solutions are very different. One is a punitive response, based on the individualistic assumption that all pregnant women have access to appropriate maternity services and that failing to utilise this care implies irresponsibility on the part of the pregnant women. The other is based on knowledge that mainstream services are not meeting the needs of Maori and to improve this situation Maori need to be consulted in determining the solutions.

Here is a further example.

The *Code* stated that:

Parents will take responsibility for seeing that their children are well prepared for school, and attend every day ready to learn.

The question is then posed:

What else can the Government do to make sure that children regularly attend school? Eg. Should parents who receive a benefit be required, as a condition of benefit, to get their children to school?

Maori students are disproportionately represented in suspension and expulsion statistics. While Maori constitute about 20% of the school population, approximately 40% of those students suspended are Maori (Te Puni Kokiri, 1998). Maori students are also more likely to stay away from school without "good reason". Why is this? Why do we have a system which does not appear to be working for Maori? Some schools currently attract Maori students, and provide a safe learning environment. Research is needed on how they do this. The results of such research could be fed into the development of nationwide strategies for improving Maori attendance and educational achievement rates. What about a focus on ways of encouraging positive interaction between iwi/hapu/whānau and schools?

How different are these solutions to the one proposed in the *Code*? Again the policy response in the *Code* implies parents of children who do not attend school every day are essentially irresponsible, requiring a punitive approach to address this issue. However, a differing value base sees a focus on the responsiveness of the schools and how schools are able to provide a safe learning environment for Maori students.

Fisher and Forester (1987) conclude that often the expressive dimension is ignored in the policy analysis process. Remember that the expressive dimension is about policies saying, as well as doing, things and about the strategic communication of the rightness of causes. There are two reasons why it might be ignored. The first is a strong belief in the positivist model and support for an objective, value free process. The second is that the policy analysis process is a reflection of the values of those who are involved in the process. There is a lack of self awareness of differing value positions and differing beliefs in terms of what may be considered right and wrong. However Fisher and Forester (1987)

also conclude that to ignore the presence of an expressive dimension within policies is to ignore a fundamental aspect of the policy making environment and a very dangerous habit to fall into. The example of the *Code* and the continuing poor statistics and evidence of the growing disparity gap indicates just how dangerous it is for Maori if we have policy makers who ignore the presence of an expressive dimension. If those underlying values and assumptions made by policy makers are incompatible with Maori realities, needs or aspirations, or the purpose of a policy is to maintain mainstream norms and values the policy response is unlikely to benefit Maori, and in many instances will be detrimental for Maori.

I have outlined above the how assumptions and values inherent in the way in which policy is developed can influence the policy solutions which are developed. My observations and experiences in relation to the issues described above are by no means new. As early as 1962 Kuhn had argued that, like all bodies of knowledge, policy arguments are no more than a set of facts based on distinctive world views about what is important, what is good, what is bad, what is not and what causes what. Reality is not something which is sitting there, just waiting to be captured and described, but is something which is socially constructed through our beliefs and values, and our beliefs and values are influenced by our cultural, historical and social positions. Our understandings and what we come to agree on as being good or bad are influenced very much by our historical, social and cultural settings.

It is tempting to leave it at that, as the focus of this paper is very much on identifying what it is about the way in which policy is developed which influences whether or not policy meets the needs of Maori. Having identified that component, which is the values and assumptions of policy makers, I need to ask the question how can I as a policy analyst address this issue?

Rejecting a positivist paradigm - policy as a participatory process

Critical psychology argues that equitable policy making and analysis requires that attention is paid to the processes by which decisions, behaviours, compromises and goals are determined. One of my primary concerns regarding the dominance of a positivist paradigm is the implications of analysts developing policy based on their own value base and ideas regarding the way in which the world should operate, without an understanding of how compatible those are with the world views, value bases and realities of Maori. Incorporated within this is the premise that Maori are not a homogenous group, and as such world views and perspectives among Maori themselves will differ. Some important questions to be asked which will assist in identifying underlying value positions and also in the analysis of intended and unintended effects are:

- Who gets to speak for who?
- Who gets to decide what is better/worse/good/bad for whom?
- How are such decisions arrived at and legitimated? (Rappaport and Stewart, 1997)

These questions provide an important basis to start from when attempting to uncover some of the consequences of policy. They recognise that what is said is dependent on who has said it and on the underlying values and assumptions of that person. In considering who gets to speak for whom we are asking who has a legitimate voice in the process and on what is that legitimacy based?

So the question personally for me as an analyst becomes how can I work towards ensuring policy will reflect the actual reality of Maori and not the realities of middle class policy makers or for that matter a young Maori policy analyst who lives in Wellington? My observations and experiences as a policy analyst show that if policy making and analysis is to avoid being dominated by a positivist paradigm, which refuses to acknowledge the existence of

values and assumptions as being an inherent factor within the policy making process, there is a need to create a process which is founded on a participatory framework: a framework which allows for the incorporation of the many different and varied voices of Maori. The goal of policy development then becomes enhancing the voices of those who lack power and the involvement of multiple stakeholders (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 1997). There needs to be a way in which various systems of meanings can be incorporated. The process should be attempting to reach an agreement on how to make decisions. The focus becomes as much on the process of policy making, as it is on the end results of policy making. The question therefore for myself, as an analyst, is in what way can I include the multiple perspectives of others in any given piece of policy work? Achieving a participatory process is a central aim of the processes which I use as a policy analyst. This is one of the ways in which I can contribute to ensuring the policy advice which I provide is based on the realities, needs and aspirations of Maori.

Conclusion

This paper has asked the question, what is it about the way in which policy is developed which influences whether or not it meets the needs of Maori? It has focused on a small component of this question by using the example of the *Code of Family and Social Responsibility* to illustrate how policy questions and solutions can be influenced by the underlying assumptions and values of the policy makers.

Why is this important? The *Closing the Gaps* report showed few indications that the disparities between Maori and non-Maori are closing. Why are the policy responses being developed not addressing disparities? Although the answer to this lies within a wide range of complex, diverse and interconnecting views and perspectives, this paper has sought to complete one piece of the puzzle by questioning the apparent acceptance of positivist models of policy

making and the role of values and assumptions within the policy process.

Reality is not something which is sitting there, just waiting to be captured and described in a neutral and objective policy making process. It is something which is socially constructed through our beliefs and values, and our beliefs and values are influenced by our cultural, historical and social positions. Recognising this, and recognising the need to create a participatory framework of policy development in which Maori values, aspirations and needs are included within the process may provide one small piece of the puzzle that is the development of effective policy.

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