BUILDING BETTER CONTEXTS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL COLLABORATION: A REVIEW OF CORE ISSUES, WITH LESSONS FROM THE "WAITAKERE WAY"

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Abstract

The prospect of government agencies, local government and community groups working together holds a number of promises. In Waitakere City, collaborative activity in social sectors is based on a long tradition of community activism, interagency collaboration and city council facilitation. Through these processes, a number of lessons have been learnt, and a language and new processes of collaboration have been developed. Drawing on these lessons, and also on international literature and wider New Zealand policy developments, this paper explores a number of critical areas for policy around collaborative planning and partnership working. It describes the need to create a better environment for local collaboration by being much clearer about the mandates that are to be managed locally, and lining these up with appropriate funding and (shared) accountability structures. These are policy challenges for central government as well as local government. There are also everyday, practical policy issues to address, including the need to recognise and resource the roles of "strategic brokers", to enable community networks and forums to achieve better "mandated representation", and to support better-coordinated action around shared outcome indicators. In particular, it suggests the formation of local "common accountability platforms" as a sustained basis for substantive local and regional collaborative action.

INTRODUCTION

Joining up government, local services mapping, regional coordination, local partnerships, collaborative strategic planning – all of these are a part of the rising complexity of social services delivery and governance, and the growing diversity of stakeholders and players (see, for example, Glendinning et al. 2002, Larner and Butler 2003, Newman 2001). It is becoming clear that a number of cross-cutting issues – such as safety and violence, school-to-work transitions, and poverty and wellbeing – will need new alignments and assignments of responsibility between different government agencies, local governments and community-sector organisations. At the same time, attempts at local collaboration, and joining up services and accountabilities, add new levels of complexity of their own.

In international literature and common experience, a number of key questions and issues are emerging, with important policy implications at national and local levels. These include issues of "vertical assignment" of tasks and accountabilities:
• Which issues should be addressed locally, at territorial authority level, regionally, or nationally?

Also included are issues of "horizontal" or local intersector integration and accountability:
• How do you break out of the "silos" of sectoral service delivery and get sustained, coordinated attention to issues?
• What horizontal (local–local) and vertical (local–regional–central) accountability processes and structures are appropriate?

There are policy issues of participation and "downwards accountability":
• How do the community get a sustained voice within decision-making forums?
• What is the role of local government in social services?

Then there are technical policy issues about how to join up:
• How do you cope with the complexities of different agencies, all with overlapping mandates to address interrelated problems, but with different consultation, planning and funding cycles (Considine 2002, Craig 2003, Sullivan 2003)?

In Aotearoa New Zealand, anyone involved with local service delivery or planning will be familiar with the kinds of complexity referred to here. This complexity will not go away any time soon. The legacy of fragmentation from the previous period remains, and it means high transaction costs of joining up: the cost of attending so many meetings, and the time and effort needed to get everyone signing on the same page. So far in collaboration this type of coordination has not been well resourced, and funding incentives (such as devolved funds local agencies could access on a collaborative basis) have been few. Many of these transaction costs have been borne locally and voluntarily

by agencies and less-well-resourced community groups contributing their time and expertise.

In a number of areas things are changing. As the government's "Review of the Centre" (State Services Commission 2001), its *Mosaics* overview (Ministry of Social Development 2003) and strategies – including the Sustainable Development Strategy (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2003) – demonstrate, central government agencies are seeking to promote joined-up, results-oriented ways of working. The Te Rito domestic violence initiative[2] has been funded on a collaborative basis. Local governments' Long Term Council Community Plan processes have been given a mandate to deliver community outcomes, in collaboration with other agencies. These developments, joined to local governments' wellbeing mandate (based on the Local Government Act), will increase the need for funding of collaboration at regional and more local levels.

With collaborative funding will come other policy considerations:
• How should joint accountabilities for outcomes be administered locally? (This has important Public Finance Act implications, as we will note.)
• How should collaboration be more effectively joined to ongoing budgets and planning cycles?

Here is the challenge for public policy: to create a better context for local collaborative effort by:
• establishing parameters and commitments
• creating better incentives and rewards for joined-up efforts
• reducing transaction costs and making voluntary time and effort more effective
• shaping clearer (shared) accountabilities around local and regional outcomes.

THE WAITAKERE WAY

However, in the meantime, at regional and local level many local authorities seem to be developing their own ways forward. In a number of these places, processes involving combined community sector and interagency forums have been established. A level of trust and familiarity with each other's ways of working has had to be developed. A common language for addressing collaboration is developing. Waitakere City is one such place. Building on more than 20 years of community activism, networks and forums, around issues such health and wellbeing, mental health, safety and disability, a number of community groups, the city council and government agencies have been developing ways to work together to promote wellbeing. As we

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2   See the website www.msd.govt.nz/work-areas/families-whānau/te-rito/te-rito.html.

will describe below, what has evolved is a series of community forums, added to by council-sponsored networks of networks, involving community forum representatives and representatives of government agencies meeting to work towards wellbeing in Waitakere. This three-way collaborative process between community, council and government agencies has been called the Waitakere Way.

"Building the Waitakere Way" and, since 1996, the "Waitakere Community Wellbeing Strategy" have community-wide Wellbeing Summits attended by hundreds of agency and community representatives, committed to the Wellbeing Strategies (Community Sector Networks in Waitakere 2000). Most recently, a "Waitakere Wellbeing Collaboration Strategy Process" has been developed involving headline "Calls to Action", each with a range of collaborative projects. Support from council staff, local and national politicians, and government agencies has also been important at many points.

During the current Collaboration Strategy process, a research project on Local Governance and Partnerships from the University of Auckland has been observing and informing proceedings. This paper has emerged from the research project's observation, participation, and a series of interviews and discussions around the process. It demonstrates some of the issues that have arisen and the language for discussing them that has developed, and makes clearer some of the policy implications. Overall, this paper aims to suggest a number of policy issues that need to be addressed if local partnerships and collaboration are to enjoy a more enabling environment than they have had so far. Readers interested in pursuing this material further should refer to our substantial issues guide arising from the wider Local Partnerships and Governance project (Craig and Courtney 2004), available from the project's website,[3] or from the author.

Getting the Right People Around the Table

The first issues to be addressed are getting the right people who can make a decision around the table, getting beyond over-consultation, and taking it back to the networks: the value of forums, summits and ongoing mandated representation.

In Waitakere, the development of locally attuned collaborative and partnership practice in service delivery and advocacy has been addressed largely bottom up, with relatively little guidance or support from central levels. This "smell of an oily rag" development process has engaged many, many folk over many years, in service delivery, activism, and network and community forum participation. Over decades, a range of community networks have held network forums where a range of sectoral

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3   www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/lpg/

issues have been fully and frankly discussed. The topics include mental health, urban Māori issues, domestic violence, social services, disability, health and wellbeing, community safety, among others.

The Waitakere experience has been that these forums provide a sustainable place for issues to be raised in ways that mean they do not slip off the agenda. Rather, there can be ongoing, iterative engagement and the development of shared strategies and advocacy around the issues. In forum discussions, people learn how to make their point and develop shared positions against which service providers, other organisations and government agencies might be in some ways held accountable. A number of strong community leaders have emerged in these forums. Plenty of government and sectoral officials and professionals have learnt ways of engaging both the community and each other through them. In a number of ways the forums have, in the words of one government local service manager, "tipped the balance" towards community accountability.

Building on these community and network forums, the Waitakere City Council has facilitated a series of ongoing city-wide forums, including the Waitakere Wellbeing Network (comprising community wellbeing leaders and council) and an Intersector Group (a forum for representatives of local government agencies). At these second-tier forums, there is considerable exchange and sharing of strategic information, and a degree of joint commitment to a range of partnerships and projects. Since 1996 the Council, together with the Wellbeing Network and the Intersector Group, has sponsored a series of semi-annual "Wellbeing Summits" as a part of a wider, collaborative, city-wide, wellbeing planning process. Most recently, this third-level forum convened to mandate a "collaboration strategy process", involving seven headline Calls to Action, including "Families give their children a great start", "Violence against children and women is reduced", "New migrants settle successfully" and "All students leave school with a plan". They all involve multiple participant agencies working towards target goals through a number of specific projects. Each meets regularly to develop and progress projects.

The collaboration strategy process is steered by a group representing community, council and government agencies, and is coordinated through a jointly funded position, which is physically based at Waitakere City Council. Over the last two years, and across all the Calls to Action, some 33 projects have been identified and "umbrella-ed", ranging from a series of school-work transition projects funded from tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars under the "Students leave school with a plan" call, to a "Toddlers Day Out", collaboratively organised under the "Families give their

children a great start" call.[4] While some of these projects might have developed without the Calls to Action, the overall collaborative focus has enabled better synergies between projects, and created plausible funding contexts where new innovations can be seen as joined up to wider local priorities and actions. Overall, the project has heightened and sharpened many Waitakere agencies' sense both of the potential and necessary ingredients for effective collaboration, and of the limitations of current policy and funding contexts for collaboratively achieving outcomes.

Internationally, local forums, local government and local organisations are being asked to take up more responsibilities in areas of service delivery, raising local accountability and planning services (e.g. World Bank 2003). Commonly, this work locally involves several agencies and groups, some directly in competition with each other, others involved in collaborative planning and partnership. With so many different interests involved, the issues on the table are both political (which agencies are represented, who represents them, who gets which resources allocated?), and technical (what is best practice, how do you address particular issues, together or separately, who maintains a wider overview, and how?). Often, expectations about "social capital" (Bourdieu 1986, Putnam 2000) are brought to this process: the hope that a certain amount of trust can be built up between the players, and that this will enable collaboration, improve communication and reduce the transaction costs of working together. While the Waitakere experience certainly demonstrates that some trust building is possible, it also demonstrates the fact that deep-seated fragmentation remains, and that neither the costs of coordinating nor the inter-organisational politics go away, even where trust is present. Rather, trust building and coordination need to be supported and political issues need to be expressly managed if local needs are to be fairly and sustainably represented.

Within the Waitakere collaboration process, the need for consistent, substantive participation is powerfully apparent. This means having the right designated officers from government agencies, community and local government consistently turning up at collaborative planning and information-sharing sessions. These people also need to be able to speak for the agencies or community groups they represent, to be able to go back to their community groups or networks or government agencies, represent what has happened at the forum, and seek commitments and resources for the next steps. In Waitakere, the emerging term for this is "mandated representation": political and technical representation in planning processes with the mandate to make things happen.

Each Call to Action has depended on the right people – with the mandated ability to make decisions – being consistently at the table, able to make and follow through on

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4   See the Waitakere Wellbeing Collaboration Strategies website for more details:
     www.waitakere.govt.nz/OurPar/pdf/wellbng-collab-proj.pdf

decisions. While most, if not all, agencies have offered high (regional) level endorsement, some agencies have proved better than others at sustaining and supporting this representation. Having four different representatives turning up to successive meetings undermines the process in both technical and political ways. There is an increasing recognition among, for example, regional management that the current system is not well placed to support this kind of sustained and mandated representation, and that some things must be done to build it more effectively into departmental structures. This process, as we will now describe, will involve matching the bottom-up mandate that emerges from local actors with a much clearer set of mandates and related funding emerging from the wider governance context: that is, from Wellington, and from the ways local government agencies are mandated to take accountability for local outcomes, alone or in collaboration with other local entities.

Sorting Out Who Does What: The Problem of "Slippery Subsidiarity"

While Waitakere's bottom-up and three-way (Waitakere Way) wellbeing collaborations have generated high levels of local participation and commitment, sustaining that commitment and turning it into substantive outcomes has proved a much greater challenge. In this, the processes have consistently run into constraints arising from the policy and governance context within which the Waitakere Way has developed. From these frustrations emerge important policy questions:

• How much potential is there in local-based collaboration for affecting outcomes?
• How much responsibility can be given to local or regional coordination?
• What issues can be addressed locally, and which should remain central government agency's core, single responsibility?

Throughout the local governance and decentralisation literature, the question of which level of government or community should take responsibility for which functions remains both pressing and fraught (Craig 2003). Multiple levels of government have some responsibility for the management and delivery of services and achievement of outcomes, the definition of law and statutes and procedures around issues, and ensuring appropriate participation and accountability. International agreements and governance, central government, regional government, local government and community organisations all claim a stake and want a role.

For example, in New Zealand's health sector, successive reforms have meant accountabilities and roles have shifted from local areas to large regions, to national level and back to districts, all within a decade (Gauld 2001). In local government, amalgamation 15 years ago of Auckland's jigsaw of cities and small boroughs has brought some clarity, but various moves to regionalisation in Auckland seem once again to be influencing current arrangements. However, what some participants in the Waitakere collaboration process have called Auckland's "creeping regionalisation" is

happening in uneven ways. A number of agencies, including the Ministry of Housing and especially the Ministry of Social Development, have hired senior policy and coordinating staff operating at the regional level, and building links back to Wellington. Other sectors are responding very differently: the Ministry of Education, for example, remains restricted in its local and regional collaboration roles by a lack of regional capacity to engage sustainably in collaborative forums, let alone joined-up innovations.

More broadly, previous reform has left health, education and welfare with different, overlapping, regional and local spatial jurisdictions, with different functions allocated to different levels (city, regional, national and community) in different departments. All operate with different planning time frames, and with few substantive higher statutory requirements to collaborate. In fact, the current managing-for-outcomes policy orientation means that sharing accountability for outcomes across agencies at local or regional level is very difficult indeed. While there is some money for pilot projects and marginal joined-up initiatives, little substantive funding will come down into local collaborative settings while achieving joined-up accountabilities at local level is so difficult. And this is a catch-22 situation: with few substantive resources on the collaboration table, there are fewer incentives to work collaboratively, and fewer strong accountabilities. As one regional manager involved in the Waitakere Collaboration process noted, there is "not one red cent" in his budget earmarked for collaboration. Accordingly, in the wider scheme of his accountabilities, he made it clear that collaboration would remain a very low priority.

Here, then, are some limits of voluntaristic collaborative processes: without resources, and substantive claims on budgets arising from clearly defined assignments of tasks and shared accountability, collaboration will achieve only very minor outcomes. These are the kinds of challenges local collaborators – no less than the intersectoral "circuit breaker" teams resulting from the Review of the Centre process – are finding they need to deal with.

Without clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of each level, or what Guerin (2002) calls "explicit upward and downward allocation of functions", the potential for confusion and frustration over governance, accountability and participation issues, between national, regional and local levels, is high. Community agencies and local government bear the brunt of resulting difficulties, spending enormous energy trying to get people consistently to local negotiating tables. A number of agencies have, in recent times, tried to address these issues through more consultation and services mapping, but this has often only added to the frustration, while (so far) delivering few resources and few clear commitments.

For example, in Waitakere in 2002, several different agencies (the Ministry of Health, City Council and Department of Child, Youth and Family Services) were all independently involved in seeking to consult with local agencies around child and youth issues. Because there are few clearly defined expectations and agreed parameters for either the community or government side of collaboration processes, community groups rightly complained of over-consultation and under-representation at the same time. They resent – again, rightly – being continually asked to start from a blank sheet in representing their concerns to each agency and having to contribute their un-costed time to processes involving no strong commitments of resources. In community forums, the need to "sort out who does what" was frequently aired. Council staff wonder aloud (and plan innovatively) about how to get from the current "mess" to something more like a "mesh" of coordinated activity, consultation and planning.[5]

New Zealand is not alone in this: decentralisation internationally has thrown up similar problems. Especially notable are issues about what is called the "sloppy definition of local mandates" or areas of responsibility. Part of the sloppiness has been a tendency for central government to create and devolve unfunded local mandates (such as, in New Zealand, the Long Term Council Community Plan community outcomes process, or local government's wellbeing mandate). In policy terms, addressing this issue involves lining up mandates, funding and functions at local level, as has been achieved more substantially in the health sector, through the establishment of District Health Boards. However, District Health Boards, councils, and other agencies will need to develop much clearer local mandates and define much more closely the functions they want to take on locally if substantive local and regional assignments of responsibility are to be forthcoming. This will be an ongoing process, where some areas (perhaps injury prevention and community safety) will be running ahead of the pack and showing how effective, properly established interagency collaboration can occur.

To be sure, the frontrunners will be creating the kinds of co-funding and shared accountability arrangements that will be needed as they go, and that may well require changes to the current Public Finance Act to establish. These changes would need to go beyond merely allowing government agencies to contract with each other (as in the current proposed reforms). They would need to be able to create joint accountability platforms (see discussion below) at, for example, regional or other local levels, where two or more government and/or non-government agencies could (or would be

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5   In the words of one experienced community organiser, "It is going to take a huge jump in levels of engagement from community to actualise this. There needs to be movement from victim mode on the part of community. Community needs to move to a level of 'significance'. There also needs to be a move from central and local government from a paternalistic, top-down approach to seeing the value and worth of community. Whilst there is an attitude towards engagement with community as a 'have to do it' instead of 'want to do it' then it will not alter."

required to) jointly take on responsibilities for tackling social outcomes, and would be jointly funded in order to be able to do so.

For this to happen, a number of other related issues will need to be clarified; for example, the relationship between contracting (with its tight and narrow vertical accountabilities) and partnerships (with their shared, but much more complex, relationships and accountabilities). In the current situation, especially in areas of mental and other health service delivery, agencies are sometimes expected to collaborate (for example, in local or regional strategies) and compete (for service delivery contracts) at the same time. Lack of clear, devolved, collaborative funding and accountability frameworks mean that coordinative and inter-organisational political issues get managed largely through sharp, hierarchical contracts, or through increasingly complex interpersonal relations between organisation representatives. Currently, the responsibility to join things up gets pushed down to frontline service delivery agents and caseworkers, who have to manage all these tensions through their daily practice.

So, how can we build better expectations about accountability, roles and process on both government and community sides? How can the roles and expectations of each level be clearly and sustainably mandated (see Porter and Onyaach-Olaa 1999, Craig 2003)? How should debates about which functions should be controlled locally (and how) proceed? Many of these issues will be resolved bottom-up on an issue-by-issue basis, and there will be a need to incentivise and enable partnerships between local people wanting to move particular things along.

However, there are also wider, systemic issues about which level of government (or civil society) should take on what kinds of issues, and here debates around the concept of subsidiarity (Guerin 2002) have shed some important light. Subsidiarity is a principle or rule of thumb developed principally in the European Union in order to clarify federal–national–regional issues. It states that central government should be seen as "subsidiary" to local functions wherever possible, in that it should only be providing subsidiary functions that localities cannot do for themselves. Even more simply, it is the principle that what can be done at more local levels should be done there.

A related aim is sustainability: when something is allocated to a certain level, the intention should be that it will stay at that level, so that people can develop networks and efficient ways of working, based on familiarity and trust. Overall, the desirable goal has been described as a situation of "sticky subsidiarity", rather than the current kinds of "slippery subsidiarity" (Coglianese and Nicolaidis n.d., Craig 2003) that see functions constantly reassigned up and down government, or no one taking responsibility at all. However, subsidiarity should not be taken as a rationale for

blanket decentralisation. Properly handled, subsidiarity debates and definitions should clarify the vital role of central and regional governments. It is important to note up front, however, that *there is no clear set of rules in subsidiarity debates about which level should do precisely what*. Rather, discussions around subsidiarity point to the need for clear working definitions, and some of the things that need to be considered in coming to them.

Strategic Brokers

In this section, we focus on the issue of how to manage the "process, process, process" of partnering: resourcing collaboration, and defining and supporting the role of "strategic brokers".

Pulling local collaborative strategy and planning together over the long haul requires a set of skills rarely recognised in official job descriptions. Especially in the fragmented, complex areas of partnership and joining up governance locally, strategically brokering collaboration between multiple agencies is becoming a necessary, day-to-day task. It is requiring the specialised development and resourcing of a range of multi-skilled people sitting in community agencies, local government, funders and service providers. In the words of one experienced network sustainer:

> There's no way you could do this sort of stuff on your own. It's around understanding how politics works, understanding how to actually get things done from within a bureaucratic organisation. It's understanding your own community in the sense of the dynamics of that community – who can get things to happen, community-wise. That's knowing all about leadership and knowing how to exercise leadership; how to tap into leadership and develop it – all those sorts of things. Process, process, process – absolutely critical. If you don't have a process that's credible, results-orientated, respectful, inclusive – all those sorts of buzzy words. But it's true, that we've only got where we've got by really struggling to get to that degree of professionalism. (quoted in Craig 2003)

Recognition and resourcing of strategic broker roles is emerging as a pressing policy issue. Collaboration and coordinated planning do not come cheap, especially in the early stages of the process. With the lack of clarity about what should be mandated as locally coordinated, it is no surprise that funding for the role of these key strategic brokers has not routinely been allocated within central government agencies or their regional programme and strategic budgets, and that, typically, coordination roles have evolved from a range of other places and funding sources. As a result, people adding coordination roles to existing job descriptions find themselves very stretched, while there are few clear expectations about what they can or should be achieving. There is considerable scope for defining and elaborating what these local coordination roles are:

for considering, for example, how to build capacity, gain recognition, develop research skills and programmes for strategic brokers, so they are better able to represent and reflect on issues.

Community organisations and network forums are also bearing an increasingly heavy load of local coordination, representation and consultation responsibilities. Commonly, community organisation or forum representatives are simply expected to find the time for such activities and, especially where they are not well resourced or dependent on voluntary contributions, this is a considerable burden. In all of this, there is a need to sustainably fund and develop local coordination expertise. This responsibility will, as is common in Waitakere, fall on government agencies, local councils and active community leaders; but, again, effective roles will need to be developed in close relationship with the community.

Again, this process will be affected by the decisions different agencies make about their own regional presence, and the de-concentration of senior policy and operational positions or devolution of powers to regional or sub-regional levels. There is currently discussion within one agency about whether officers with regional (Auckland) responsibilities should be located in Auckland or Wellington, in order to be more effective. Other agencies are significantly strengthening regional and sub-regional strategic policy capacity, for example, with Social Development Managers having regional responsibilities within the Ministry of Social Development. How significant these developments end up being will depend to some extent on whether discretionary resources and devolved responsibilities accompany these positions, or whether these positions are merely information conduits between localities and Wellington.

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"How Will We Know When We've Made a Difference?"
The Problem of "Contextualising" Indicators

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Another pressing policy issue arises in the area of generating local and regional indicators and targets, and relating these meaningfully to the day-to-day activities of those involved in services and collaboration. Internationally, there is increasing attention being given to providing local information, including local indicators for wellbeing and poverty (see, for example, Minnesota Milestones 2003, Quality of Life 2003). Lots of information has long been collected, but knowing which parts are crucial to local wellbeing, what the links are between any given intervention and changed outcomes, and how to maintain community-wide focus on targets are still considerable challenges. Local information is typically subject to "small numbers" problems (e.g. significant natural fluctuations in any time period and gross under-representation of certain groups), and it is always difficult to differentiate changes in any outcome derived from a programme or project intervention from those caused by influences at the regional, national or international level.

Such are the difficulties with local indicators that many decentralised and interagency programmes simply do not target or collect a whole range of outcome measures. Process measures are typically better identified, although these, too, need reworking for the current collaborative environment. The indicator information that is routinely and officially collected (e.g. the Social Report and the Big Cities indicators) is rarely closely linked either to project planning needs (timing, specific content) or to an understanding or model of what social and economic forces drive particular change in, say, wellbeing or violence outcomes. That said, there is considerable scope for official information to get a lot closer to actual local programmes, and to begin to embed or contextualise their social and wellbeing reporting numbers in actual programmes and processes of change (Hemerijck 2002).

In collaborative, participatory planning processes, the strategic use of appropriate numbers can signal from the outset key overarching issues that need sustained attention. It can avoid such issues being put aside by various groups who are pushing their own agenda at the expense of a bigger-picture perspective. It is especially important to maintain focus on issues like poverty and wellbeing across the city or region, setting realistic targets and keeping people committed to them. However, at the moment, there is relatively little sustainable and consistent use of such targets. The sorts of community-based indicator determination long advocated in New Zealand by Marilyn Waring, and more recently by Ron Coleman,[6] may go a certain distance to durably ensconcing these kinds of targets in day-to-day community activities. But socio-economic and "social determinants of health" data (Kawachi and Berkman 2003, Marmot and Wilkinson 1999), for example, also need to go into the local information mix, and its guardians need to learn how to relate it more closely to local government and community priorities. At the moment, perhaps the most significant data being operationalised locally come from programme evaluation and monitoring: the challenge is to contextualise this as well to these wider social determinant factors on regional and sub-regional bases.

At another level, there is considerable scope for using locally generated, contextualised numbers in wider processes of comparative intervention evaluation. In Europe, national territorial authorities are engaging in a method of collaborative comparative benchmarking in core areas of public policy. This process is called the "Open Method of Coordination" (Hemerijck 2002, Overdevest 2002), and it functions as a kind of "soft law" encouraging, but not forcing, harmonisation and comparability. For example, countries of the European Union have developed national action plans against poverty and social exclusion within which common objectives are adopted. After each two-year round, the European Commission drafts a report describing the member states'

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6   www.gpiatlantic.org/clippings/mc_guardian2-13-01.shtml

initiatives and identifying best practices. Forums and seminars for politicians and officials are a part of the method, gaining wider support and pooling experience. The intention is that, in an atmosphere of candour and constructive solution-seeking, different countries and sectors will be able to compare their different outcomes and programmes and, through ongoing conversation and perspective challenge, learn more about what makes a difference and why.

As Overdevest (2002) discusses, the Open Method of Coordination has important affinities with projects of "deliberative democracy", enabling deliberative standard-setting through multiple local experimentation and pooling of information (including best practice) across local experiments. Such a process could readily be applied and incorporated into the local information gathering of the Big Cities Indicators project, aspects of the Ministry of Social Development's *Social Report*, or the District Health Boards' or Councils' wellbeing strategies.

Fleshing Out the Collaboration Strategy through "Calls to Action": Building Common Accountability Platforms

Overall, the big policy challenge is pulling all these things together in sustainable shared local accountabilities. With headline goals, shared projects, clearer local responsibilities, mandated representation, shared and contextualised local numbers and so on, local collaborators could begin to build sustainable ways of keeping themselves, each other and outside agencies more accountable to both issues of big-picture change and community priorities. Applying the principle of subsidiarity, areas where local collaboration can demonstrate ongoing gains could be sustainably developed and durably built into process and funding. Put these elements together, and you are building an agreed (or common) community-mandated platform for accountability around key issues – what might be called a "common accountability platform" or "common accountability framework".

The versions of such platforms being developed in New Zealand (not usually under that name) are very bottom-up, "number 8 wire" affairs, compared to the larger sector and locality-wide social services budget-planning platforms being developed elsewhere. Local councils in New Zealand take very different views of their roles, accountabilities and relations to other organisations, so that the diversity of collaborative approaches looks likely to remain, with some being very weakly resourced and supported.

Crucially, however, such common accountability platforms do not need to emerge perfect from the heavens, or be lowered top-down from the highest levels of government. Rather, they can be locally built and added onto from just a few core elements (e.g. shared forums, time, trust and energy). To grow, they will need official

recognition and basic commitments to sustained "honeypotted" funding (i.e. funding to which access is dependent on shared commitment to common goals, or to projects that relate to such goals). To succeed in the long term, they will require both sustained local participation by everyone, from volunteers to regional commissioners, and ways of generating claims on budget through mandated roles in planning and budget processes, and relevant resource allocations. They will need ongoing political support, and time to develop good processes and demonstrate tangible gains. And they will also need a sense of their own limits: many social and wellbeing outcomes are determined by very big-picture changes indeed, and it would be unfortunate and counterproductive if local agencies were to be held ultimately accountable for changes well beyond their reach (see, for example, Craig 2003, Jargowsky 1997).

What Do You Need to Build Common Accountability Platforms?

To begin a common accountability platform one needs:
- shared forums at community, local government or interagency level
- multi-level representation: community, local government and government sectors
- well-resourced, skilled and supported coordination and facilitation – at least a full-time coordinator
- shared goals and goal-related projects
- capacity and skills for group work, and a shared understanding of meeting/group dynamics
- advocacy and other engagement links to political decision makers
- time, trust and energy.

To build a common accountability platform one needs:
- consistent, mandated representation by appropriate, empowered representatives attending regular forums
- a developing common language for talking about issues, processes, structures and roles
- shared information bases: local statistics, GIS information, and contextualised (shared, agreed and project-related) indicators
- "claims on sectoral and other budget" attached to local collaborative processes
- extra funding incentives to develop process and projects: discretionary/ "honeypotted" funds
- cross-pollination between planning processes: development of shared planning objectives and items appearing in multiple agencies' regional and local work plans linking Councils' Long Term Council Community Plan to other local planning

- stronger linkages between public health and local government wellbeing planning and mandates
  - central-level leadership: high-level mandated coordination, and agencies required to work with local councils and community.

To gauge impact and push further one needs:
- a wider debate about subsidiarity, devolution, levels and roles
- benchmarking across plural places, with contextualised bases and Open Method coordination and comparison processes
- contiguous boundaries between local authorities, District Health Boards, government service regions
- to be lining up mandates, funding and functions at local or regional levels, within wider devolution/decentralisation processes.

At present, the Waitakere Collaboration Strategy has developed, in its Calls to Action, the makings of shared accountability (and mandated representation) around a number of shared headline goals. Onto these local Call to Action platforms are being added shared projects, an evaluation process asking groups to come up with outcome measures, and process measures assessing collaborative processes. At present, this coordination is being funded by a number of local and central government agencies and actively supported by the city council. In the long term, these functions will need a more active commitment from central government (i.e. upscaled, incentivised funding) if they are to be sustained. The several Calls to Action may not all be sustained and some may be better left to develop later. Currently, their effects are limited by their context: they can become part of a process of cross-pollination between different agencies' plans, with the same objectives and items appearing in multiple agencies' regional and local work plans. However, with the right incentives, the beginnings of claims on budget, and alignment of mandate, funding and function, a lot more might happen.

Perhaps more important in the long term will be local government's recently mandated Long Term Council Community Plan processes. Obviously, defining these and arriving at collaborative ways to achieve them will be a major challenge, especially if the only incentives government agencies have to participate are largely voluntary. No amount of skilled strategic brokering and development of trust and mandated representation will substitute for the incentives and accountabilities that will arise if this mandate is substantively funded, perhaps through a contestable fund for national best practice outcomes projects, or better locally devolved funds to prime the pumps and sort out the governance bumps to enable these collaborative initiatives to really get off the

ground. In the United Kingdom, within the Local Strategic Partnerships programme[7] there has been considerable development in this area, which has been able to draw on a much deeper funding base (and a political/state programme of funding governance innovation) than has been available here (albeit from a much larger funding base, of course).

Common accountability platforms promise the benefits of local activism, close local knowledge and motivation, as well as the advantages of a wider comparable and universal standard against which service delivery and funding commitments could be benchmarked and monitored. In this, they might help avert one of the greatest dangers of decentralisation, which is the rapid growth of inequality arising from the very different abilities of different localities and communities to respond to their own needs. As noted above, decentralisation without such universal commitments can easily lead to the most vulnerable being made responsible for their own problems in ways that take no account of wider factors driving social inequality and injustice: a form of blaming the victim. Local partnerships, too, can become just another element in a wider programme of "social inclusion", which ensures everyone's participation (e.g. in labour markets or training), without ensuring more equitable income distribution or health outcomes (Levitas 1998, Porter and Craig forthcoming).

Common accountability platforms, then, might make it clear that central government has a core ongoing role and accountability to sustainably provide resources to address wellbeing and social justice issues, and to address them evenly across the nation. In Waitakere, efforts to sustain this higher level of focus on poverty and social justice issues have been much harder to sustain, despite enormous investment of time, energy and expertise in community development, and maintaining collaboration and participation.

CONCLUSIONS

This is an interesting time to be in social policy, local government or the community sector in New Zealand, as devolution, regional and local coordination, participation and local accountability issues are being worked out in all sorts of unexpected, uneven ways. If social development is to continue to draw on the best efforts and intentions of community, local government and government agencies, it will need to learn lessons like those being learnt through the Waitakere Way, and the Waitakere Wellbeing Strategy. On the other hand, almost paradoxically, the nature of local coordination means that everyone will need to build collaboration processes, or processes like them, for themselves. They will need to make their own mistakes, and learn how best to draw

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7   See the website, www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/lsps.asp

on local energies. However, it would be a shame if some of the lessons here were not made a part of wider, better-defined and better-resourced attempts to build shared accountability around important social issues.

The principle of subsidiarity suggests that what can be done well at local level should be done at local level, and that sufficient resources for that action to happen should be allocated (and often devolved). In areas where local knowledge matters, where local community agencies and networks have vital roles and good processes of representation, and where local managers can respond with discretion and innovation, there would seem to be good reason to continue processes of defining and setting up common accountability structures locally, and delegating relevant governance and decision-making on funding. If this was done well and in appropriate areas, some of the "mess" problems of slippery subsidiarity, and multiple, ever-changing levels could conceivably be diminished, and better local accountability developed. Evidently, however, as Prudhomme's potent (1995) critique of messy, underconceived decentralisation indicates, there are also some functions and sectoral programmes that should not be devolved, if regional inequalities and overall governability of social outcomes are to be maintained. Getting to good outcomes in these areas will depend on the right mix of strong national and more local measurement and accountabilities, and on matching active local engagements with strong national social commitments.

In sum, interagency, locally collaborative strategy and partnership working seems to be here for the foreseeable future. How effective it is, and how it can address wider social issues and inequalities remains to be seen. Meantime, a lot of energy is being expended by many people, to uneven and uncertain effect. Further progress will depend on a number of factors, including central-level recognition of core issues, and facilitation of local processes. And smart policy innovation – defining and lining up mandates, funding and functions, and funding innovative ways to share more substantive accountabilities between government agencies, councils and community groups.

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