

Multicultural New Zealand



Multicultural New Zealand is the operating name of the New Zealand Federation of Multicultural Councils. Established in 1989, the organisation consists of 18 regional Multicultural Councils from Auckland to Invercargill, offering a range of community services. There are also national councils for youth, women, seniors and business. Multicultural New Zealand offers a collective voice for ethnic, migrant and refugee communities to inform and advise government, organisations and the general public on multicultural policy and practice. In this interview, Executive Director Tayo Agunlejika (Nigerian) discusses some of the key aspects of Multicultural New Zealand's engagement with Te Tiriti, the relationship of Te Tiriti and multiculturalism, and some of the challenges of organisational implementation.

This case study shows a national umbrella organisation focusing on approaches to support regional members to develop abilities to work across difference, and to develop local Treaty relationships. Multicultural New Zealand has strong knowledge of itself as an organisation and of the reasons Treaty relationships are important to it. The case study acknowledges that sometimes a fear of getting things wrong can slow down relationship development.



Understanding the Treaty in relation to our organisation

The focus of our organisation is on maintaining cultures so, in doing that, we recognise the importance of the Treaty. Our commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi has been embedded in our constitution since our establishment in 1989. The Federation believes that New Zealand is a multi-ethnic society in which Māori have special status as Tangata Whenua (people of the land) and special rights under the Treaty of Waitangi. It is about respecting indigenous people. If we are to talk about a multicultural society we have to demonstrate that there is a bicultural foundation, we have to show that by leading. In our constitution the Federation has two objectives relating to the Treaty: “to promote the awareness of the Treaty of Waitangi amongst its members; and, to raise the consciousness among ethnic communities of the needs, aspirations and status of Māori”. Our role is to support our membership to understand the issues for Māori and to make it possible for Māori to know that we understand and respect the issues.

We have a memorandum of understanding with Network Waitangi Ōtautahi to help us in meeting our objective of promoting awareness of the Treaty. They support us with educating our members and helping us to understand processes. We have developed a document *A Treaty Based Multicultural New Zealand*¹ with them, which outlines our understandings in relation to the Treaty. The aim of the document is to promote and explain our position in relation to the Treaty – both to members and to Tangata Whenua.

We were also involved in a project with the Tangata Whenua, Community and Voluntary Sector Taskforce a few years ago, which involved organising noho marae for our members. Members learnt some reo Māori and a bit about how a marae works. The noho marae were open to all migrants and we had Europeans come who have lived here for 20 years and never been to a marae. Coming out of this initiative, we are

¹ Available at: <http://multiculturalnz.org.nz/uploads/sites/multiculturalnz/files/pdfs/2014/Multicultural-NZFMC-broch-A4-print.pdf>

now working on having every new migrant visit a marae within six months of arriving in New Zealand, as part of their induction to being here. We are lobbying agencies like Immigration New Zealand, in collaboration with Te Puni Kōkiri, to pick it up and establish it as an orientation for new migrants.

Understanding the relevance of Te Tiriti to our work

Understanding what the Treaty of Waitangi and multiculturalism is about, and participating in the noho marae project, led to the realisation that we have similarities with Māori as ethnic communities – in terms of cultural values, for example concepts of whānau. Based on those similarities we need to find a way to build relationships with Tangata Whenua. As migrants we need to pay homage and respect to the owners of the land. We can only actualise multicultural policies with the understanding and support of Tangata Whenua. The statement, “What is good for Māori is good for everyone” is profound; that is the spinal cord of anything we do.

We began working with Network Waitangi Ōtautahi when we were struggling to get traction in promoting multiculturalism and discussion came about that we need to acknowledge the Treaty. Multiculturalism is not to overshadow Te Tiriti. The concept of Tangata Tiriti is important to understanding the part of non-Pākehā ethnic communities’ relationship to the Treaty. Resources like the *Treaty of Waitangi Questions and Answers*², *A Treaty Based Multicultural New Zealand*, and the Treaty Resource Centre website³ have all helped our understanding. The noho marae have also been an important part of our learning as they have supported us to understand Māori processes. It is important to have an understanding of Māori culture and values, and a respect for tikanga, along with an understanding of the Treaty.

We recognise the tensions between the Crown and Māori. New Zealand becoming more diverse also creates fears and tensions. We have to start planning the framework to ensure that as we become more diverse we have policies that will accommodate everyone. Most importantly everyone needs to understand the Treaty. We recently published a report *Our Multicultural Future*⁴, which is based on conversations around the country about a vision for a multicultural society. A key theme was that migrants thought the Treaty is very important – that the Treaty needs to be acknowledged, the indigenous rights of Maori respected, and te reo and tikanga Māori embraced. This was very profound to us.

Leadership

Leadership of the organisation is central to driving and achieving Treaty aspirations. The relationship of our organisation’s leaders with Māoridom is important. When we started advocating for multiculturalism people like Professor James Liu advised on the need to get Māori views. We have had a relationship with people through different networks like the Community Sector Taskforce and Network Waitangi Ōtautahi. Those people have helped us to understand the importance of tikanga and of the Treaty. Our constitution also helps us – having the commitment to the Treaty identified as part of the principles of the organisation. We aim to embed tikanga Māori into what we do through our policy and processes.

Developing relationships

We hold three national meetings a year and where possible these are held on marae, in order to expose people to the Treaty and the part it plays in relation to Māori communities. Over the last five years, seven of our meetings have been on marae. When meetings are held elsewhere we invite representatives of the local iwi to open and close our conference.

² Available at: www.nwo.org.nz

³ www.trc.org.nz

⁴ Available at: <http://multiculturalnz.org.nz/Publications>

At a national level, we encourage our local organisations to build relationships with the local iwi. We purposefully move the national meetings around, and the first choice is to be at the local marae. Meeting at the local marae gives the leverage to start a relationship, and after the meeting there is the potential to continue to build that relationship. The success of that has varied in different parts of the country, some have a good relationship and for others it is just one-off. That is one of the challenges.

We have discussed the need to have a kaumatua to inform our work and our external relationships, but we have not managed to progress this yet. We understand there are things you need to get right in this process and we do not know who the right person is to approach about this role. Likewise with having a Māori name for our organisation.

One of the challenges for us is that we have not yet established on-going relationships with Tangata Whenua nationally. We understand it takes time but the organisation has been around for many years and we still have individual rather than broader relationships. It feels like there should be a framework or structure for our relationships. At the local level, there are strong relationships in some areas. In those areas the leaders from both sides are engaged. For example, Ngāi Tahu has appointed an ethnic community liaison person.

At the national level, there are a number of different leadership groups, like the Iwi Leaders Forum and the New Zealand Māori Council. We don't want to make the wrong move so the challenge is, "who are the right people to engage with at the national level?" It is difficult to work that out. There is a gap in terms of forming the on-going relationship beyond the noho marae. There are a lot of positive symbols of relationship in that context but we need a next step. In terms of making progress I think it is about addressing questions of who has the authority to progress this and getting the right people around the table to discuss and to give direction so that can be taken up nationwide.