



Wesley Community Action Submission for Productivity Commission

What are the main dimensions of persistent disadvantage that should be included in the Terms of Reference as areas to be investigated?

The current welfare system is broken and is no longer fit for purpose.

Our system that is meant to stop people moving into persistent disadvantage was designed for a different environment and reflects a world view that is not reflective of our Te Tiriti honouring commitment.

Related to this lack of a vital role of people / communities experiencing disadvantage to be agents for their change. The current system supports the status quo (persistent advantage).

The current policy approach is not geared to embrace the interconnection between environmental, economic, social, cultural and political domains and how they support wellbeing.

2. Where should the Commission focus its research effort?

□ What do you see as the biggest gaps in our collective knowledge?

Ways of understanding, noticing and measuring He Ara Waiora.

Understanding why some initiatives / communities are making positive progress despite the broken system - noticing the exemptions to the rule (bright spots) and understanding what it is that makes them tick. What are the signs of hope?

Understanding the value and role of community / whānau led initiatives as opposed to govt programmes and organisation led initiatives. Just because they may be harder to measure doesn't mean they don't play a significant role.

□ What areas would you encourage us to undertake further research into, and why?

Understanding the history and role of social movements for justice and wellbeing in Aotearoa (Māori land, Te Reo Māori, Anti smoking, Anti Nuclear, Woman's Suffrage etc) and the conditions that enabled them to achieve effective change.

The research task of the inquiry is to ensure that research (existing and new) is undertaken and used in a way that strengthens ownership of, and use of the findings by, the research subjects to help them become agents of change.

3. Where should government focus its effort on finding solutions?

□ What are the key barriers preventing New Zealanders from reaching their potential?

The negative impact of the 'New Public Management' system introduced in the 1980's.

This approach magnified the post war welfare model with the over reliance on 'markets, measurement and management'. It has concentrated power and control in Wellington based government institution (that consume a large amount of resources) with an over focus on managing risk and reducing spending at the expense of innovation, supporting emerging ideas and informal agile community networks.

Applying a Te Tiriti approach beyond settlements process

The disadvantage group is 'persistent' because the design of our current system is not geared to our current environment. This is addressed by aligning a with Te Tiriti honouring approach as mātauranga Māori brings a different world view that can re-orientate the systems needed to help people flourish. The need to do this is demonstrated by He Ara Waiora (referenced in the consultation document) and there being no means of measuring waiora from this world view.

□ What are the key triggers or circumstances that can result in people becoming stuck in persistent disadvantage?

The current system reinforces disadvantage creating a compounding effect.

When people who experience persistent disadvantage interact with the current system intended to 'help' them – they risk triggering further disadvantage. This toxic impact is also unhealthy for the many workers in the system. For example, trauma can be triggered by having to explain your problem / issue or justify it in order to access assistance.

Disadvantage is further entrenched when it is assumed that a 'disadvantaged' person lacks capacity and agency to help address their situation. Our prison system represents a major Government investment in ensuring a class of citizens remain in persistent disadvantage, and that this disadvantage is passed on to future generations.

□ Are there key windows of opportunity in a person's life course where positive changes are easier to secure, or where they are more likely to endure?

The evidence on intergenerational transmission of trauma is critical.

The danger with the framing of this question is that it places the focus at the individual whānau level to tackle what is, a systemic issue (a both / and approach is required). This question can take the focus off other people and other parts of the system and the role they play in maintaining the status quo, ie privileged peoples and the role they play to maintain their financial and political advantages at the expense of disadvantaged people.

The dominant western linear lifecycle approach is of limited value. There is no beginning and end point in a whānau system. Each new generation carries the life experience of earlier generations and is an opportunity for a whānau system to do better – thus becoming a parent generates possibilities. A crisis can also create opportunities for positive change if the response is compassionate and knows how to respond to trauma.

□ Which aspects of government policy are most important to focus on? For example, secure housing, mental health treatment and supporting new parents.

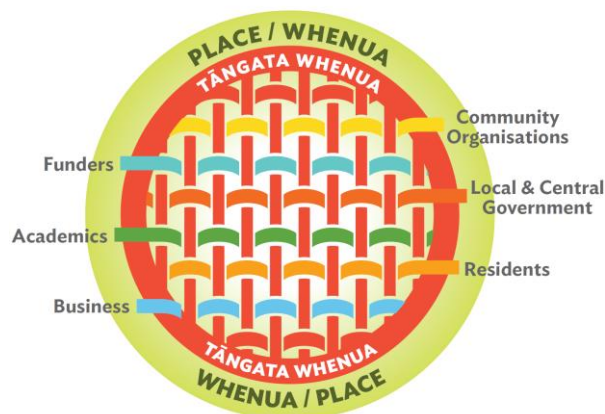
Essential to shift from a Welfare Approach to He Ara Waiora

It is critical that the inquiry does not go down the rabbit hole of picking key policy areas. The strategic shift to a waiora approach and the related reorientated world view will shift the question away from ‘what policy issues are most important?’ to ‘how do we help foster wellbeing, capability and resilience with whānau / hapori?’ The focus needs to remain on the whole design of how policy is conceived, designed and implemented.

□ Are changes needed in the ways that government services are provided? For example, devolving responsibility for services, joining up service provision and helping those most in need navigate the system.

The critical role of whānau / community / citizen led initiatives

The issue is broader than how government services are provided. It relates to the ‘world view’ that the ‘services’ have been designed out of. The examples quoted in the question have all been tried with limited success and reflect the assumption that a ‘service’ or ‘agency’ will fix the disadvantaged group. This assumption is embedded in the current system and keeps this group trapped in a dependency cycle and teaches them not to step into being the authors of their own lives. Whānau-ora and Te Whakawhanake ā Hapori (Community-led Development) are two approaches based on appreciating whānau / Hapori as holders of expertise of their lives



Te Whakawhanake ā-Hapori
Weaving our connections and contributions

4. Is there anything else that you would like to see in the Terms of Reference for this inquiry?

You can't study disadvantage without studying advantage

Underlying this inquiry is an analysis of the political and economic power - who holds it and how it is exercised. A systems perspective is required to tackle the challenge. It is not possible to focus on 'persistent disadvantage' if the flipside 'persistent advantage' is not also studied. The balance between advantage and disadvantage is maintained by the political system. It is likely that tackling this will facilitate creative evolution of our democracy – the moving away from a dominant binary (govt / opposition) model to a more participatory and consensus approach.

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