

A Civil Society perspective

On Sunday afternoon, 22 April, we packed the upstairs conference rooms at St Andrews Conference Centre in Wellington for the Civil Society SDG pre-Summit consultation. It provided an opportunity for civil society to come together ahead of and in preparation for the Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals the following day at Victoria University.

"The pre-summit consultation on Sunday was informative and reflected that scars still run deep over New Zealand's colonisation and land loss from our indigenous peoples. These issues are not unique to New Zealand and we received a similar perspective from the Yaqui Nation with ancestral lands lying in what is now the USA/Mexico border region". [participant's reflection]

Speakers Andrea Carmen and Hinewirangi Kohu-Morgan provided both an indigenous and wahine Māori perspective on the SDGs.

"A key message was that 'if you are not at the table, you are on the menu'. In other words, if you don't talk, challenge those who challenge you, then your demise is imminent." [participant's reflection]

Pedram Pirnia also spoke about challenges of accountability, and views and perspectives of all three speakers fed into the facilitated workshop discussions in the afternoon, on the topics of: what is accountability, how do we ensure indigenous views, and the challenges of messaging and use of language. Parts of the afternoon went live on Facebook and notes from the workshop discussions will be available soon.

On Monday, 23 April, the inaugural Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals – Partnerships for the Agenda, saw 300 people from across civil society, business, government and youth fill the Victoria University lecture room to "excite, inspire and mobilise around the SDGs".

We learned how businesses have grown and adopted selected SDG's to aid its business strategy, and how the SDGs do not comprehensively represent an Indigenous perspective. Andrea Carmen, in her keynote address, commented on Indigenous peoples' 'defensive' approach to the SDGs and the necessity of Indigenous peoples' involvement with the framework to protect their rights and share their 'ways of knowing' around what is now called sustainable development.

Anaru Fraser, Kaiwhakahaere Matua Hui E! Community Aotearoa, in the panel on how the sectors were organised for delivering on the SDGs, advocated towards inculcating across government, private and community sectors to increase awareness and collaboration. Girol Karacouglu, Head of School of Government at Victoria University presented a prototype of the SDG indicator website, to 'hold a mirror' on how we are tracking on the SDGs.

The talk by the SDG Coordinator in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hugo von Meijenfeldt, was insightful and supplied interesting contrasts to the New Zealand scenario. The only common denominator between the Dutch government and the New Zealand government at implementing SDG targets and aligning the goals with government policy presently is the understanding of and need for quality data. New Zealand presently has a data deficit. [participant's reflection]

Good data are the key to track and report back on SDG delivery to the UN which, as we know now, is forecasted to occur in 2019 for the first time.

The Hon. Minister James Shaw asserted that the SDGs were at the heart of this government (and as such are written in the parties' confidence and supply agreement). He spoke about the need for data in a pyramid configuration bottom-up to generate information, knowledge, policy and, ultimately, decision making on SDG delivery and alluded that New Zealand is in the data phase.

Government officials, in a panel on where the government is at, alluded to the existing of an emerging "SDG strategy" but also the need to depoliticise aspects of sustainable development and the SDGs in New Zealand, for example, child poverty and water quality. MfE Chief Executive pointed to silos on sustainable development delivery and poor alignment of funding across government to focus on common goals, such as the SDG.

Ultimately, the government is not clear how to operationalise the SDGs in a cross-party, cross-agency and long-term framework yet. Minister Shaw iterated that the wellbeing of future generations depends on our actions today and the SDGs are key to deliver on our promises to future Kiwis. There is commitment from the government to act on the SDG. The how and who, however, are still being thrashed out. [participant's reflection]

The 25 Action Stations, set up in a world café style, encouraged cross-sector conversations towards the 'how and who' and several action stations focused on the need for a platform to collaborate, facilitate and share stories, models and ideas across sectors, and shifted the focus away from outcomes to processes for SDG implementation. The winning idea, which will be presented in 2019, was research and development of an online platform for sharing ideas and positive SDG stories to provide users with information on how their work aligned with the SDGs and to connect them with others in the same space.

The summit was closed by the Wellington Deputy Mayor acknowledging the Wellington's role in the SDGs and handing over the waka to AUT, where the 2019 Summit will be held.

It was important to hear the challenges of the SDGs, but also some of the positive work already being done in NZ in this space. The Summit was an opportunity for cross-sector collaboration, and we saw the value in this as it will be key to SDG implementation. As an inaugural summit it was a fantastic starting point for the SDGs in NZ. [participant's reflection]

I thought both gatherings have brought out important issues that are parts of the whole story. Both were valuable particularly for the people who were able to attend. I was able to listen and participate in different ways that was very affirming and able to share my excitement and story with others around me. A very big thank you to all the people who gave their time and talents, that made both, vibrant and challenging events. Attending has encouraged me to continue to be engaged in thinking about and exploring actions of how we together can use the SDGs to result in a loved future for all who will live in New Zealand. [participant's reflection]

We think both the pre-summit and summit were a success, if not at least because they did what they set out to do, to "excite, inspire and mobilise" around the SDGs, and we will have to see where it takes us for the next summit at AUT in 2019. In future summits, we hope to see a larger representation of youth and the media, as key players in the promotion and delivery of the SDGs in New Zealand.

We want to thank all of you for the great work that you do in the communities and to everyone who has participated in the discussions up to now. We look forward to continuing working with the sector and across sectors towards a fairer and sustainable Aotearoa.