

Hui E! submission

Hui E! Community Aotearoa (Hui E!), as the national body supporting a strong, connected and engaged community sector, welcomes this opportunity to make a submission on Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ)'s localism discussion paper: *Reinvigorating local democracy: The case for localising power and decision-making to councils and communities*¹. We commend LGNZ for its leadership.

We support the proposal to enrich democracy and empower communities to be actively involved in shaping their own futures through localism, as well as the incremental and consultative ways that progress is proposed. Our comments within that context focus on three specific areas:

- the importance of localisation for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)²;
- the role of civil society in the localisation process; and
- a ground shift in the responsiveness of local government to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In addition to our submission, we fully support the submission made by Transparency International New Zealand – which focuses on transparency, good governance, and public participation and in particular, that any decentralisation of services will need to be accompanied by greater scrutiny, community engagement, transparency and accountability, including legislative, legal and regulatory challenge, and a ground shift in the responses of local government to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and including tangata whenua in decision-making.

Views expressed in our submission are generally shared among a wider group of organisations supporting a coordinated and cohesive response to achieving a more equal, just and fairer future.

Importance of localisation for the achievement of the SDGs

- Local Governments have a great deal to contribute to sustainable development as many of the critical decisions to be made about sustainability lie with local government; for example urban design, transport decisions, waste disposal and energy efficiency, but also social cohesion and decent work opportunities.³
- The 2030 Agenda and SDGs, to which Aotearoa New Zealand committed to in 2015 with 192 other countries, provide a vision and a roadmap to end poverty, promote peace, share wealth, and protect the planet by 2030. Yet the SDGs are nowhere mentioned in LGNZ's discussion paper. Without the full and active engagement of local government with the global goals, little will be achieved. Aligning vision and action with the SDGs can be a powerful tool for taking communities towards

¹ <https://localism.nz/assets/Documents/f411ba372e/Reinvigorating-local-democracy-LGNZ-July-2019.pdf>

² <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

³ Local Government has a big contribution to make in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, speech by Helen Clark, 23 November 2017, <https://helenclarknz.com/2017/11/23/local-government-has-a-big-contribution-to-make-in-achieving-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

sustainable development. The publication *The Sustainable Development Goals: What Local Governments Need to Know*⁴ explains how each of the 17 SDGs relates to the daily work of local and regional governments and can be a useful resource.

- Central, regional and local governments need to work together to use the SDGs to better integrate their strategies and scale impact towards them. There are untapped opportunities to use the SDGs to drive transformation, particularly on SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities⁵; integrate plans, strategies and reporting; align a diverse set of stakeholders; and engage communities in the agenda to raise public awareness.⁶ There are some examples that can be of interest, where councils have proactively built the SDGs into their strategic and monitoring frameworks, such as in the case of the city of Sydney and of Melbourne⁷, Rotorua Lakes Councils⁸ and Auckland City⁹. The latter two are also examples of Local Governments accepting shared accountability with central government, for the implementation of UN conventions and Treaties. Local Governments need to be supported and enabled to do so.
- Libraries are increasingly recognised as community hubs (their primary objective has shifted from books to people) and provide good examples for having changed to reflect their particular location and respond to the need for localisation.¹⁰

The role of civil society in the localisation process

- Localisation calls for an inclusive approach that utilises local knowledge to tailor the ambitious SDG agenda to specific local circumstances. Localisation should therefore be conceptualised in a holistic manner and include civil society, local government, indigenous leaders and communities, religious organisations, the private sector, citizens and other parties.¹¹ Young people in particular continue to face barriers to participate in progress towards the SDGs, which include exclusion and lack of representation in formal decision-making bodies and lack of civics education. In order to address the issues confronting our time, local governments need to empower young people to help drive decisions at local level. This could be done for example through partnership with universities, polytechnics and employers to provide volunteering /work opportunities particularly for young people in the areas of climate change.
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play crucial roles as agents of accountability and service delivery; they give voice to the poorest and most marginalised citizens; and

⁴https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/publications/UCLG%202015%20The_sdg_s_what_localgov_need_to_know.pdf (2015), published by the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), a global network of cities and local, regional, and metropolitan governments and their associations.

⁵ SDG 11 marks a major step forward in the recognition of the transformative power of urbanisation for development, and of the role of city leaders in driving global change from the bottom up.

⁶ Local Government and the SDGs – an untapped opportunity? <https://www.ashakayla.com/blog-1/localgovernmentsdgs>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ The 2019 People's Report on SDGs describes Rotorua Lakes Council's approach on pages 77 and 78 www.sdg.org.nz/peoples-report

⁹ Cities have adopted the themes of SDGs in various ways, by becoming a CEDAW city, as Auckland has done, and addressing the recommendations in the 2018 report from the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women by, for example, improving safety, and equal opportunities for women. www.sdg.org.nz/peoples-report, page 79

¹⁰ The People's Report on SDGs, pages 53 and 78-83 www.sdg.org.nz/peoples-report

¹¹ The Roles of Civil Society in Localising the Sustainable Development Goals, Policy Brief, published by the Global Public Policy Institute <https://www.gppi.net/2016/03/07/the-roles-of-civil-society-in-localizing-the-sustainable-development-goals>

monitor progress through data collection and reporting. It is therefore essential to unravel the potential of CSOs in the effective implementation of the SDGs as well as to enhance their engagement, impact and effectiveness in both global and local development processes.

- The People's Report on the 2030 Agenda and SDGs¹² is an alternate report for Aotearoa New Zealand and provides civil society perspectives on progress made towards sustainable development. The report highlights that CSOs and others in civil society are making concrete contributions in areas encompassed by the SDGs, but that there is inconsistent engagement between government and civil society, lack of collaborative planning, and sustainable funding and resourcing. This risks the achievement of the government's vision and the SDGs, which are grounded in legally binding international human rights commitments, and have multi-stakeholder partnerships at the core.
- There has been growing interest among Aotearoa New Zealand CSOs and community groups in models for deliberative democracy, which are in contrast to top-down consultation methods often used by governments. Citizen interaction is the basis for a genuine functioning democracy and deliberative democracy is based on the idea that our views and positions are not fully formed, nor fixed and we develop how we really feel about a given issue in light of it being able to be refined and enhanced by deliberating with peers and learning from a broader world than our own.¹³ The values and strategies of such community discussions align precisely with those of the global 2030 Agenda and indigenous traditions and should be encouraged and supported.
- The formation of a multi-sectoral SDG alliance in Aotearoa New Zealand aims to enhance collaboration across sectors, across the country, and across generations, ensure regular interactions with governments on the critical issues of our time, and monitor progress towards a more just, equal and sustainable future. We welcome local government support for such an alliance.

A ground shift in the responsiveness of local government to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

- The poorer outcomes for Māori identified in the People's Report on the SDGs, particularly in health, education and employment, demonstrate the effects of many years of neglect and post-colonial racism. Local governments have failed to consistently include tangata whenua in decision-making and in their responsiveness to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It requires a shift in the responsiveness of local government to Te Tiriti o Waitangi for localism to be successful.
- The People's Report and its 39 recommendations provide a basis for moving forward together, in greater partnership, to implement a vision and framework that clearly link Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the SDGs and central and local government policies, to create a more just equal and sustainable future. To achieve this, we need to ensure 'no-one is left behind'. We can do this by seeking opportunities to learn about what is not known, to understand other people's struggles and to act accordingly and appropriately.

¹² <http://www.sdg.org.nz/peoples-report>

¹³ Empowering the Civil Society Voice on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals — a UNA NZ event: recording of the event available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvdT-iL8Ebs&feature=youtu.be>

Additional points we would like to make based on some feedback we received:

- The concept of central versus local government and international comparisons in the paper need greater analysis. More attention needs to be paid to the federal structure of many of the countries that Aotearoa New Zealand is compared with. Many of the states (or provinces) are substantially larger than Aotearoa New Zealand, and while they may not be 'central' governments (there is a national or federal government above them), they do sit above a complex of local governments, and from below, look very much like New Zealand's central government in that they manage much of the social services. If those structures are taken into consideration, the analysis may look very different. What matters is how close to communities the decision-making power is.
- In citing the different structures of other countries, it would be valuable to have more information on the satisfaction with the arrangement in different contexts, and information on voting levels and community participation. It would also be useful to have a more comprehensive rating scale so we knew where we stood amongst, for instance, OECD countries.
- The critique of centralised decision-making is reasonably well established in the paper, but greater assessment of the problems involved in and with local decision-making needs to be included, and the way in which the various levels can effectively complement each other. Better understanding of the history of and rationale for shifting powers and structures in Aotearoa New Zealand would be valuable.
- There needs to be greater attention to what community engagement means in the Aotearoa New Zealand context – what do we know about areas where such engagement has been successful, or not so successful, and how could communities be prepared for greater responsibilities? What are the benefits for them, and what is likely to attract them into such activities?
- The ICLEI: Local Governments for Sustainability – Resilient Cities Update¹⁴ places much more emphasis on collaboration between agencies rather than shifting responsibilities.
- Networking is an important means of empowering local groups and communities and enabling them to collectively engage with higher authorities. This requires resources, capacities and capabilities.

For any questions about this submission, please contact:

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¹⁴ <https://iclei.org/en/publication/resilient-cities-thriving-cities-the-evolution-of-urban-resilience>