Department of Labour
TE TARI MAHI

KEEPING PACE WITH A NEW ZEALAND SETTLEMENT PROJECT

ABSTRACT

The New Zealand Department of Labour is responsible for leading the implementation and further development of the New Zealand Settlement Strategy. The department's key focus within the strategy is to improve access for new migrants and refugees and their families to appropriate information and responsive services that will support their settlement in local areas. The department is doing this by inviting government and non-government agencies, and migrant and refugee communities, to participate in setting up local Settlement Networks, that will form a national network of Settlement Support New Zealand (SSNZ) initiatives throughout key settlement areas in New Zealand. The SSNZ initiative (the "programme") is intended to provide a clear point of contact for migrants and refugees and a local network which creates a point through which key stakeholders can collaborate for effective local settlement outcomes. However, as the programme unfolded some of the assumptions underlying the initiative design have been challenged and the original evaluation approach and framework has required modification to respond to the emerging questions and issues. Initially the evaluation strategy was based on a model of how the programme was intended to be set up. It has subsequently been revised and adapted as the developments in local areas diverge. The authors use their experiences so far in this evolving evaluation to show how flexibility, adaptability and innovative thinking are necessary for undertaking evaluations in a changing environment.

AUTHORS

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BACKGROUND - THE NEW ZEALAND SETTLEMENT STRATEGY

The New Zealand Settlement Strategy was launched by the Government in December 2004 to provide an integrated framework for responding to settlement barriers, which included a lack of co-ordination and information sharing between publicly funded services, as well as some policy and service delivery barriers. The Strategy outlined six goals which were intended to collectively contribute to the overarching outcome of 'enhanced settlement outcomes for migrants that contribute to social cohesion'. These Goals were to enable migrants and refugees to:

1. obtain employment appropriate to their qualifications and skills
2. become confident using English in a New Zealand setting or be able to access appropriate language support
3. access appropriate information and responsive services that are available to the wider community (for example housing, education and services for families)
4. form supportive social networks and establish a sustainable community identity
5. feel safe expressing their ethnic identity and be accepted by and become part of the winder hose community
6. participate in civic, community and social activities.

In the 2004 Budget, the Government agreed to fund a settlement package to make progress on achieving the first three of the six Settlement Strategy goals. The package included: funding for a Secretariat to lead and support a National Settlement Structure to oversee the New Zealand Settlement Strategy; funding to establish a national network of Migrant Resource Services and funding for an existing Refugee Resettlement programme to support Goal 3; funding for ESOL[1] programmes to support Goal 2; and careers advice and qualifications assessment to support Goal 1. These are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1   The New Zealand Settlement Strategy and initiatives to meet its goals

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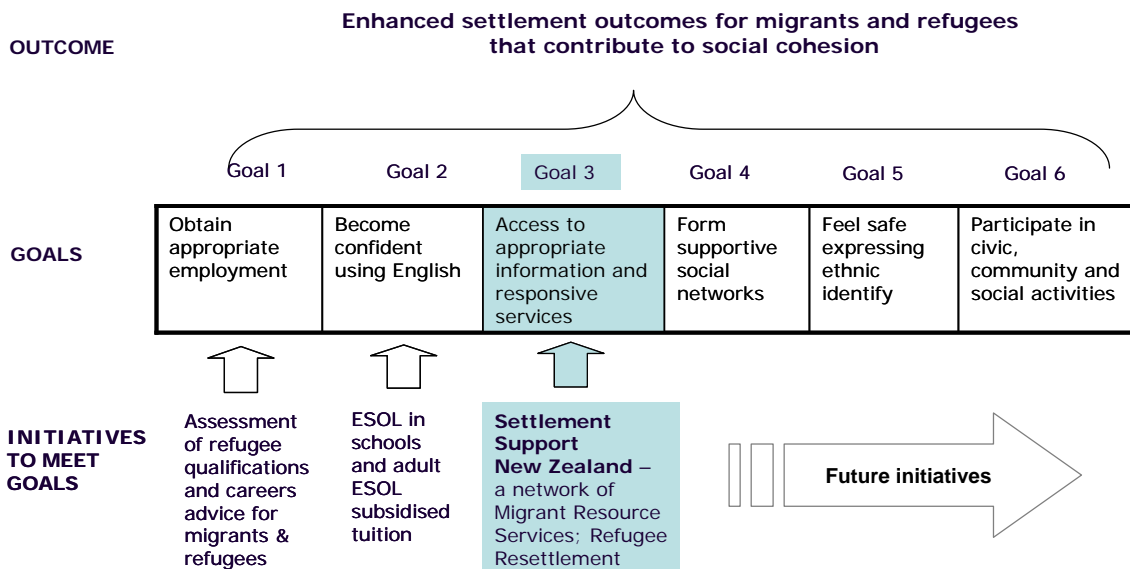
[1] English for Speakers of Other Languages.

ACHIEVING GOAL 3 – SETTLEMENT SUPPORT NEW ZEALAND

The objectives of goal 3 are that '*migrants and refugees have access to appropriate information and responsive services that are available to the wider community (e.g. housing, education and services for families)*'. To respond to this, the Settlement Support New Zealand (SSNZ) initiative was set up. It has a dual focus:

- better co-ordinated provision of settlement advice and information to migrants and refugees
- more responsive mainstream services for migrants and refugees at the local level.

The expectation was that positive settlement outcomes could be achieved by Government agencies, non-government service providers, and migrant and refugee communities *working together* in local settlement areas to:

- improve the accessibility of settlement information
- improve the responsiveness of their services to migrants and refugees and their families
- ensure that local settlement planning reflects local settlement needs, identifies gaps and eliminates any duplication of services
- ensure that feedback on settlement needs and issues identified at the local level feeds in to the national policy arena to enable ongoing development and planning for the New Zealand Settlement Strategy.

There are strategic and operational components to the programme. The operational components include, establishing a clear point of contact for migrants and refugees to access information, and facilitating orientation sessions and workshops that support settlement needs. The strategic components involve, establishing a Settlement Network of local stakeholders who plan for local settlement needs, and mapping information that identifies local settlement service providers and migrant and refugee settlement service needs. Rather than providing direct case-management, the initiative focuses on providing local facilitation and information co-ordination services. It targets migrants and refugees in their initial settlement phase, which has been defined as two years for migrants and three years for refugees. The mediating mechanisms of the SSNZ network were designed to add value in two ways:

1. through structures set up to enable increased collaboration and co-ordination to occur in each locality, i.e.:
   - a clear point of contact for migrants and refugees to access information
   - Settlement Support Co-ordinators
   - Settlement Networks
   - Settlement Network Support Groups.
2. through networking processes designed to enhance service delivery, i.e.:
   - increased collaboration at a local level
   - national facilitation
   - increased co-ordination between service providers
   - increased opportunities for the migrant and refugee communities to participate in designing appropriate solutions.

The Department of Labour produced a guide for implementation of the SSNZ local initiatives in March 2005[2]. In the first phase, 10 geographic communities were identified and the Settlement Division worked actively with the local authorities and other key settlement service agencies to inform them about the initiative, and ensure lead agencies were identified to develop proposals for setting up SSNZ in these communities. By 30 June 2006, these lead agencies had developed Local Settlement Networks, Local Settlement Network Support Groups and hired co-ordinators.

The Department initiated the second phase of SSNZ in the second half of 2005, by identifying an additional nine locations around New Zealand, and conducted the same process of informing local stakeholders, identifying lead agencies and working with them to develop proposals and establish the initiatives. By July 2006, the funding agreements for the second phase initiatives had been drawn up with all nine lead agencies. Work to implement SSNZ was well under way.

ORIGINAL EVALUATION APPROACH

In its guide to implementation for SSNZ, the Department indicated that it would require both quarterly and annual monitoring reports from the local initiatives and that an overall evaluation would take place with its final report at the end of the 2006/07 financial year. Accordingly an evaluation plan was developed based on a general understanding of the programme theory at that time. The programme theory assumed that a clear point of contact would be established as one of the mediating mechanisms through which the objectives of SSNZ would be realized. These points of contact were visualized as physical locations, which could be visited by migrants and refugees to access information on settlement services. From an evaluation perspective, these contact centres offered a central point for gathering information about the impact of the services on settlement outcomes for migrants and refugees.

The original design of the evaluation and monitoring framework was built around this core assumption and it aimed to capture information directly from refugees and migrants who came into contact with these centres. The design was steered towards an impact approach by policy to meet the accountability requirements of the reporting regime. The reporting guidelines developed included both qualitative and quantitative measures. The quantitative measures included collecting demographic details about, and totals of, migrants and refugees who visited these contact centres. The qualitative measures included descriptions of the types of settlement issues identified in each locality and the steps taken to address these.

In summary, the evaluation approach was intended to generate information about the impact of the initiative on migrants' and refugees' access to settlement information so as to demonstrate the effectiveness of SSNZ and its contribution to achieving Goal 3 of the national Settlement Strategy. The approach also included a review of the implementation of the programme, which is described by Owens et al[3] as a typical process-outcomes evaluation.

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[2] *Settlement Support New Zealand - a national network of migrant resource services initiative: A guide for implementation*, March 2005, the Department of Labour.

[3] Owen, John, and Rogers, Patricia, "Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches" 1999, Sage Publications, pp48.

EVALUATION CHALLENGE

Most evaluation processes are based on performance against predicted goals. However, to be effective, the evaluation must match the dynamics of the programme or the 'system'[4] to which it is applied. Failure to do this means that we end up focusing our attention on the issue that offers least value in terms of learning about the programme.

In the context of this evaluation, it took us time to disentangle the behaviours of the different actors in the system and ensure that the evaluation reflected the emerging questions. As the programme unfolded in practice, the underlying theory did not pan out as anticipated as there were significant differences in the approaches taken by the localities to address the issue of refugee and migrant access to information. Originally, one of the key mediating mechanisms was expected to be a point of contact, but as the local initiatives developed, it emerged that some had excluded the contact centre aspect and focused exclusively on setting up their Local Settlement Networks to promote greater collaboration and co-ordination across service providers in their localities. As a result, several of the lead agencies had begun planning initiatives that focused purely on strengthening behind-the-scenes knowledge and agency responsiveness without making provision for a clear point of contact (website, phone line and face–to-face) where migrants and refugees could access information about services.

This did not become evident till the first Settlement Support Co-ordinators' training meeting in November 2005. At this meeting the Settlement Division introduced a contact management tool to help the co-ordinators collect the information needed to meet the requirements of the monitoring and evaluation strategy. The tool provided a systematic way of collecting data about the migrants and refugees who contacted the clear point of contact. It was at this point that the disconnect became apparent. Some of the co-ordinators and their associated lead agency representatives collectively reflected on the tool and pointed out that it would not work in their context as they had not planned to have any direct contact with migrants and refugees. They reasoned that their localities had existing points of contact, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) or libraries, and no new ones were needed.

Other co-ordinators were, however, still planning to establish SSNZ points of contact for their local communities of migrants and refugees, because no clear points of contact existed in their localities. This highlighted the wide variation in how the initiatives were being set up in each locality and highlighted a second beneficiary population of the programme - the government and non-government service providers and migrant and refugee community leaders participating in the Settlement Networks.

This evidence of such divergent local developments caused the evaluators to call a stop to their existing plan and start adapting. It had become obvious that the original plan to conduct a summative evaluation using monitoring data across all 19 initiatives would not suffice. A new plan would need to be developed emphasizing the formative approach with a focus on how the

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[4] Eoyang, Glenda H. & Berkas, Thomas H. (1998) "Evaluation in a Complex Adaptive System." April 30, 1998. Available at www.winternet.com/~eoyang/EvalinCAS.pdf and at http://www.chaos-limited.com/EvalinCAS.pdf, viewed July 26, 2006.

initiatives were contributing towards the SSNZ national outcomes. Figure 2 shows a timeline of the changing context for the evaluation of the programme.

Figure 2   Timeline of changing context
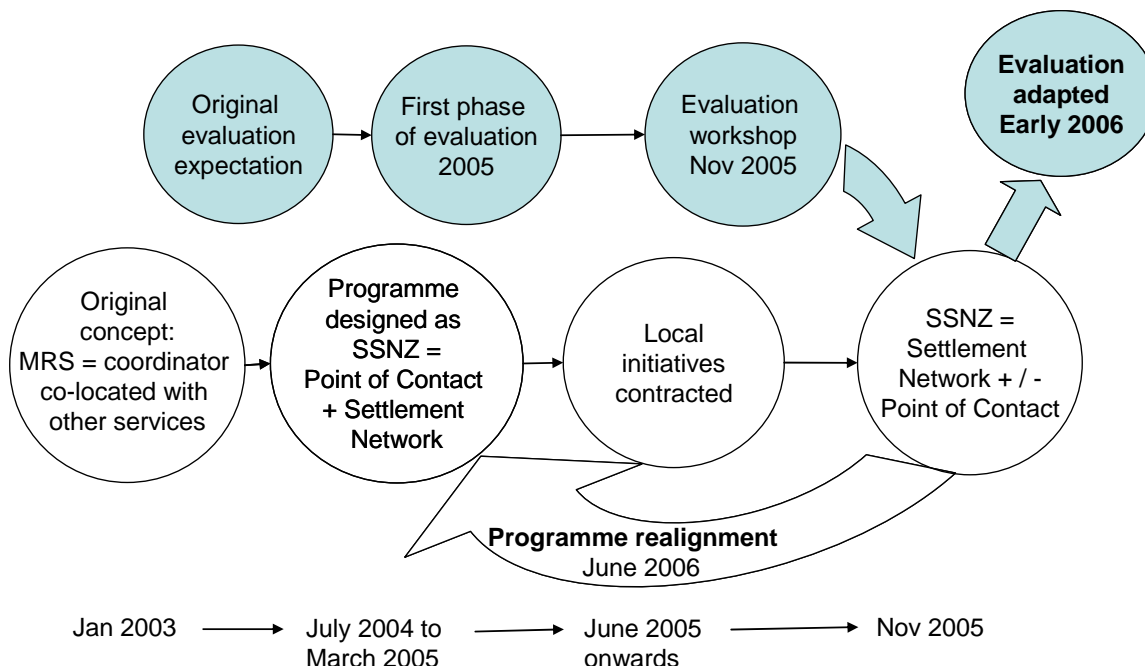
ADAPTING THE EVALUATION STRATEGY

Developing a new evaluation plan involved rethinking every aspect, including:
- who benefits from the programme
- the uses of the evaluation
- refocusing the evaluation question

while
- continuing to meet the Government's accountability expectations.

Who benefits from the programme

Initially migrants and refugees were seen as the key beneficiaries of the programme because the programme aimed to improve their access to appropriate information and responsive services directly through a point of contact and indirectly through the service providers. However, the lack of points of contact for some initiatives forced a refocus on the networking element with service providers. There were now two groups that needed to be tapped for information for the evaluation: the service providers who were part of the network and the end users i.e. the migrants and refugees.

The uses of the evaluation

While it was still clear to Department staff that the evaluation was necessary for accountability reasons, several new needs were added to that list:

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- clarifying the programme theory through development of an outcomes hierarchy or intervention logic
- improving the programme by identifying and disseminating best practice information between the initiatives.

Department staff realised that the initiatives were taking longer to establish locally than had been expected and consequently that the evaluation was taking place during the development phase of the programme rather than after its implementation, as had been earlier assumed. It became obvious that the evaluation needed to include some aspects of clarificative and proactive evaluation forms described by Owens et al[5], specifically, the development of a programme logic and the collection of information about 'what works' and 'what doesn't work' that could be disseminated between the regional initiatives. The new evaluation approach was designed to take these needs into account. A series of workshops were held during the first few months of 2006 and an outcomes hierarchy was developed, see Appendix A.

Refocusing the evaluation question

The need to meet the Government's accountability requirements remained constant and the evaluation needed to collect data to satisfy this requirement. However, it became clear that changing the overarching evaluation question from *'Is the programme working?'* to *'How is the programme working?'* would still meet these accountability requirements. The local initiatives would still be required to report on their activities, such as how many network meetings, workshops and orientation sessions they had facilitated via a monitoring framework, but if they did not have points of contact with migrants and refugees they would not be required to report on this aspect. The evaluation could focus on finding out how and in what contexts SSNZ was contributing to the goal of improving migrant and refugee access to appropriate information and responsive services.

OUR NEW APPROACH

Given the dynamic and emergent nature of the programme for which we were developing an evaluation strategy, we were careful to ensure that the following principles were observed the second time around:
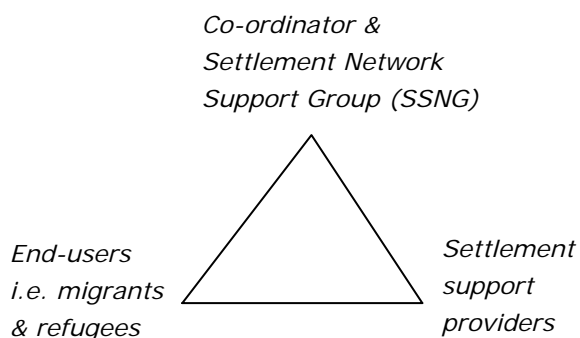- explicit understanding that the logic model aimed to capture a emerging logic and pattern of change
- the need to revisit and revise the evaluation design often
- the need to ensure that a variety of data is collected to reflect the different parts of the programme.

Following these principles led us down a different path and we ensured that the evaluation approach incorporated multiple strategies, data sources and informants supported by a robust monitoring framework. The practice of triangulation was embedded in the evaluation to ensure that different dimensions and facets of the programme was explored and validated by service providers and programme staff, as shown in Figure 3. A case study approach was built in as part of this evaluation to explore similarities and differences between the various SSNZ

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[5] Owen, John, and Rogers, Patricia, "Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches" 1999, Sage Publications

initiatives, and compare and contrast refugee and migrant access to information in communities with SSNZ networks.

Figure 3   **Triangulation of data sources for each case study**

Co-ordinator &
Settlement Network
Support Group (SSNG)

End-users
i.e. migrants
& refugees

Settlement
support
providers

CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Our experience in this evaluation is not new to most evaluators. Evaluators work in a dynamic, ever changing policy environment and are constantly called upon to assist, advise and sometimes rescue policy analysts from evaluation commitments that are made early in the policy development process. The ongoing challenge for us as evaluators is to ensure that the evaluation framework that is suggested, remain just that - *suggestions* – and is flexible so as to fit the reality of the programme when it unfolds. It is not uncommon for policy papers to commit to evaluation (usually an 'impact evaluation') at the time of developing the policy but not enough time is built in to (a) allow for the details of the programme to solidify as it beds in, and (b) to review or validate the original approach. In our view, this problem is not likely to go away anytime soon and therefore it is useful to look for solutions in *evaluator* practice in these policy agencies. In thinking about how we could overcome these problems in the future, there are three possible pathways to explore:
- make more use of 'evaluability assessments' before implementing evaluation plans
- design flexibility into our evaluation plans to recognise the uncertainty of fundamental detail as the programme unfolds
- perceive the programme as a 'complex adaptive system' so that evaluators are sensitised to its complex and changing nature - this could have led down a different path.

Just as we were redrawing the evaluation design, another new development surfaced. The Department realigned the initiatives, as part of process of negotiating their second annual funding agreements, more sharply towards the original design (i.e. insisting on a clear point of contact being established in addition to the Settlement Network.) This realignment was initiated as it was decided that both sets of interventions (working behind the scenes to improve collaboration and providing a clear point of contact for migrants and refugees) were essential to achieving the stated objectives. However, this time the evaluators were prepared with a more flexible design that recognised all the mediating mechanisms. We had also implemented, with the Settlement Division, a robust monitoring framework to collect data across all the initiatives. While the 'final report' at the end of the 2006/07 financial year

probably will not be able to evaluate the overall success of the programme –more time to bed in – it will provide plenty of information about how the initiatives are contributing to the Settlement Strategy Goal so policy can review the programme direction. It will also produce best practice information to share across the initiatives to inform their on-going development.

Appendix A

Settlement Support New Zealand (SSNZ) outcomes hierarchy

9. Improved access to appropriate information and responsive services for migrants and refugees

End-user work stream

8a. Migrants and refugees receive appropriate information

8b. Local agencies provide services that are responsive to migrants and refugees

7a. Local orientation sessions and targeted workshops held for migrants and refugees

7b. Targeted workshops held for agencies on specific settlement issues, as needed

6a. Clear local points of contact identified or established

6b. Local Settlement Networks represent and clarify the roles of local agencies

Provider work stream

5. Local services mapped against local migrant and refugee communities

4. Lead agencies develop a 3 year strategic plan and annual work plan

3. Co-ordinators recruited and trained

2. Settlement Network and Settlement Network Support Groups (SNSGs) established

1. Proposals from lead agencies approved by DOL

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