

ASIAN communities

Executive Summary 2005

ENGAGING ASIAN COMMUNITIES IN NEW ZEALAND

A report prepared for the Asia New Zealand Foundation by

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¹ For the purpose of this research, Asia is considered as East, South, and Southeast Asia. We recognise that 'Asian' is a contested term: it does not accurately represent the diversity within the Asian continent or amongst Asian diasporas.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The presence of Asian¹ communities on New Zealand's social landscape is nothing new. From the goldfields of Central Otago in the 1800s to significant Asian suburbs in the third millennium, Asian communities engage with New Zealanders at many levels. This engagement is set to continue – and probably increase – into the future: the proportion of Asian New Zealanders in the population is expected to nearly double from the 2001 level of 7 percent to 13 percent by 2021.

This research, commissioned by the Asia New Zealand Foundation, considers the nature and models of engagement of Asian communities and characteristics of successful engagement.

The types of engagement considered have indicated what elements and components are needed in programmes. There are good examples of engagement but few that are all encompassing in their effectiveness. Some programmes have been included as examples of what is good and capable of imitation. The fact that good examples of comprehensive engagement programmes are not apparent is in itself a significant finding. It points the way to the need for more direction, co-ordination and involvement of central government in enabling and facilitating engagement. A co-ordinated development of settlement services is emerging through central and local government. Our recommendations reflect the need for this.

The information is drawn from 17 general focus groups (94 participants in total), 26 specific interviews and 10 general interviews with members of Asian communities, and, in the case of interviews, with practitioners, specialists and researchers.

SECTION ONE: KEY FINDINGS

We considered what makes and encourages successful engagement of Asian communities, drawing on the experience of a number of individuals and programmes actively involved in assisting Asian communities to engage in New Zealand. Additionally, we drew on international examples, from Australia and the United Kingdom.

International:

- Australian examples reveal the potential for successful collaboration between local government and ethnic councils and the role for local government in strengthening capacity in multicultural communities;
- In London a niche business opportunity lies in tapping the resource of talent in the South Asian community;
- Providing social and workplace language programmes helps enhance communication and connection between mainstream and migrant cultures; and
- Partnership and specialist programmes to meet needs are keys to success.

New Zealand:

Throughout this research particular characteristics of programmes were noted rather than one programme above others. Programmes identified by participants included those run by health boards, migrant resource centres, ethnic councils, local government, businesses, communities and libraries.

Key elements to ensuring successful engagement include:

- Engagement beginning and being well advanced within the first 12 months of arrival; those who have not engaged within this time may well enter patterns of interaction that diminish engagement;

There is a continued need to educate New Zealanders on understanding and working with those of different cultures.

- Engagement must begin even before a migrant arrives; ideally this will involve connecting with a New Zealand mentor;
- Unrealistic expectations must be managed and information must be provided in the language of the migrant;
- In the first 24 hours in a new country, of major importance is how the New Zealanders encountered are able to enter a cross-cultural situation;
- All migrants need to attend an orientation programme shortly after arrival; and
- Longer term, migrants need to learn about the 'New Zealand way'.

Successful elements of programmes include:

- Responding to a recognised need – determined collaboratively between the host and migrant community;
- Targeting appropriately – various groups are not being served by more general programmes;
- Considering consultation as a whole-community exercise with the relevant communities/agencies/people included – including involving not only community leaders but also community members and avoiding 'focus group fatigue';
- Delivering in a culturally sensitive manner; there is a continued need to educate New Zealanders on understanding and working with those of different cultures;
- Demonstrating legitimacy such as through the support of a mayor, member of parliament or other local or central government representative; and
- Having trusted leadership; the most successful programmes appear to be those that have both an individual co-ordinator and an agency behind that individual that is fully committed to assisting participants.

SECTION TWO: KEY FINDINGS

The framework for this section of the report is a socially cohesive society which is broad enough to encompass the varied experiences and engagements of Asian communities and offers a unique perspective. Social cohesion covers belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy.

Belonging:

According to participants in this research, crucial aspects of belonging include whether they feel part of a neighbourhood, participate in social activities, have friends and have access to telephone and the internet:

- Being part of a neighbourhood is important but for participants mixing with neighbours is generally rare;
- Most social activity takes place in religious/church groups, sports clubs and educational activities, but friendship outside ethnic communities can be problematic, with participants noting barriers to making friends with New Zealanders such as language and a culture gap;
- Telephone and internet access is important for communication with families and friends in participants' countries of origin; and
- A significant number of participants are involved in a wide range of voluntary or unpaid work, which connects them to those outside their work communities and also gives them a sense of purpose.

The vast majority of participants had experienced some form of overt or subtle racism and discrimination.

Participation:

The significant elements of participation include education, voting, employment and housing:

- Almost all the participants had participated in some form of education. Almost universally the purpose of education was to get a job. Generally, their experiences of education were positive;
- Participants considered voting in elections and having their views represented to be important. The main reason for not voting was not knowing enough to make a wise choice;
- Finding some employment – particularly if it was labour-intensive or physical work – was not difficult but finding employment appropriate to qualifications was. Participants felt they had been let down in this regard and wanted more assistance; and
- Most participants were satisfied with their housing, with only a few mentioning discrimination on the basis of their name/ethnicity.

Inclusion:

Inclusion in a society is more than feeling one belongs, it also relies on being well informed about accessing services, health-care and integration programmes:

- For participants, accessing services was generally very easy as it was often by phone or the internet;
- However, there was large dissatisfaction with health services. The health system was considered confusing and expensive; and
- Most participants had not attended a specific integration programme, although many had attended ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programmes, which were found to be useful. However, there was a call for more training and government support for ESOL provision.

Recognition:

Recognition is more than just visibility; it is also about 'being noticed' and 'being taken notice of'.

Recognition can be negative, through racism and discrimination, or positive, through first language use:

- The vast majority of participants had experienced some form of overt or subtle racism and discrimination. The media were considered to be at fault by reporting only negative things about Asians; and
- The retention and use of first language are seen to be important in maintaining ties with participants' communities and countries of origin.

Legitimacy:

Legitimacy means being visible and accepted, heard and understood, and being not peripheral but central. Legitimacy is considered through safety, immigration services, the Treaty of Waitangi and service providers:

- Many participants felt New Zealand was a safe country. However, participants also expressed great unease at what they perceived to be a lack of 'morals' in New Zealand society;
- A number of participants believed that the government should take responsibility for providing more accurate information to migrants before they arrive in New Zealand. Participants also felt that the government should take responsibility for the settlement of migrants. Specific suggestions were given to improve settlement;
- About half of the participants saw the Treaty of Waitangi as having no relevance to them; others had a variety of views; and
- Participants identified a range of useful service providers. However, they noted that more discussion, more value and more funding should be present in these providers.

SECTION THREE: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for future initiatives to engage New Zealand's communities successfully flow from the findings of the research.

1. Language-Related Recommendations:

These recommendations have different purposes and are divided into three sections – skills for members of the host communities, facilitation of services for host-Asian community liaison and skills for members of Asian communities:

Host communities skills:

- Communication with second language speakers; and
- Asian language learning.

Host-Asian community liaison:

- Interpreting services;
- Translation services;
- Call centres;
- Bilingual and multilingual print materials;
- Bilingual and multilingual websites; and
- Bilingual and multilingual audio-visual material.

Asian community language skills:

- English language learning;
- First/Heritage language maintenance; and
- First/Heritage language media.

2. General Recommendations:

Policy:

- The formulation of a multicultural policy to actively include Asian peoples in policy development and processes;
- Supporting community identity, for example through integration of Asian aspects in the education curriculum; and
- Expanding and developing free interpreting services especially for health and social service providers.

Programmes:

- Orientation for all new arrivals, both migrants and refugees, using voluntary programmes and the Mangere refugee centre programme as models;
- Development and extension of work placement programmes to overcome barriers of lack of New Zealand work experience and 'fear' of employing migrants;
- Professional development for community leaders;
- Extension of, and continued support for, high-quality English language programmes and programmes like the ESOL Home Tutor Scheme that have the added dimension of assisting with engagement;
- Cross-cultural training for all government and local body agencies, targeting all levels but especially policy makers and front-line staff;
- Personalised settlement strategy developed by the new migrant in conjunction with a trained mentor; and
- Overall co-ordination of migrant orientation programmes.

The responsibility for engaging Asian communities rests with *all* New Zealanders.

While the implementation of these recommendations may be the tasks of central or local government, or ethnic councils, or voluntary agencies, the responsibility for engaging Asian communities rests with *all* New Zealanders.

Asians are becoming an important part of New Zealand culture; they are already a significant part of many of New Zealand's communities. Together, communities of all manner of diversity will form the New Zealand of tomorrow; engaging those communities starts today.