



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

INTEGRATING INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS AND KNOWLEDGE INTO NEW ZEALAND'S FOREIGN POLICY

Key messages

As part of the New Zealand government's commitment to Māori Crown Relations, and to strengthen the quality of its partnerships and policies in the Pacific, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is seeking to better integrate indigenous Māori values and knowledge into New Zealand's foreign policy and development co-operation.

Keywords

[Partnerships](#) | [Policy and guidance](#) | [Poverty and inequality](#) | [Human resources](#)

Key partner

[New Zealand](#)

Challenge

New Zealand has a long history of independent Māori leadership and work on international indigenous issues and rights. Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi underpins New Zealand's international co-operation, requiring consultation, engagement and protection of Māori interests. Yet whether the levels and forms of Māori participation in the government's foreign policy formulation and implementation are adequate is contested, and there is [recognition](#) that the government has more to do to "transition to the Māori world", i.e. build understanding of Māori values and knowledge and integrate them into New Zealand's institutions and policies on an equal footing.

Approach

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has recently sought to integrate Māori worldviews and *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge) into foreign policy and development co-operation, by:

- **Updating the policy framework:** New Zealand's Pacific policy, the [Pacific Resilience Approach](#) (2021), is framed by Māori concepts that acknowledge the connections between Māori and other indigenous Pacific cultures. This includes recognising the mana (authority) of each nation and reinforcing New

Zealand's *whanaungatanga* (kinship) connections to the wider Pacific. Five principles guide New Zealand's international engagement: *Tātai Hono* (the recognition of deep and enduring ancestral connections); *Tātou Tātou* (all of us together); *Whāia te Taumata Ōhanga* (journey towards a circular economy); *Turou Hawaiiiki* (navigating together); and *Arongia ki Rangiātea* (focus towards excellence). These principles are integrated into policies, bilateral agreements, guidance for staff and partners, and official communications.

- **Upskilling staff in Māori capability:** Increasing staff competency, such as through language training, is a priority of MFAT's 2021-2025 organisational [Strategic Intentions](#). Other initiatives include internal training courses for MFAT staff on both *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* and Crown-Maori Relationship History, and updating staff guidance on including Treaty obligations into policy development practice.
- **Establishing formal structures:** This is a nascent area of work and is taking time to implement. For example, *Te Taumata*, a Māori advisory board to formalise MFAT's engagement with Māori on international trade issues, was [established in 2009](#). However, a [Māori Partnership Group](#) to engage on broader foreign policy issues was only recently established – in November 2022.
- **Using Pacific-based research methodologies:** MFAT-funded [research into the importance of context in education in the Pacific](#) was guided by Pacific research frameworks and data collection tools, based on the [Research Framework](#) endorsed by the Pacific Education Ministers in April 2021. MFAT is using the findings of this research to inform subsequent project design.
- **Elevating indigenous knowledge in multilateral fora:** For example, New Zealand gave space to indigenous peoples' voices in the 2021 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) agenda and connected Māori with APEC's work.

Results

Key results include:

- **More robust partnerships, based on shared values and an equal footing.** The integration of indigenous values into MFAT's approach to partnerships has strengthened mutual understanding with New Zealand's Pacific Island partners.
- **A *Tolovae Ane Le Upenga/Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategy*,** developed and launched under the New Zealand Māori Tourism (NZMT)-MFAT partnership piloted in Samoa. This strategy (covering 2021-2026) has been [embraced by the Samoa Tourism Authority](#) and is part of their umbrella destination strategy, along with product and experience development workplans.
- **A 20-year commitment by APEC countries to cooperate on indigenous economic inclusion,** as set out in the [Aotearoa Plan of Action 2040](#). Engagement with Māori in negotiating recent free trade agreements with the United Kingdom and the European Union saw Māori economic and trade interests prioritised, and the inclusion of the [Te Tiriti o Waitangi exception](#).
- **Paving the way for others to make progress and for renewed international collaboration.** For example, New Zealand and Canada's 2022 [Indigenous Collaboration Arrangement](#) commits to ensuring indigenous peoples' participation in international relations.

Lessons learnt

- **Political leadership and will are critical.** Increasing indigenous participation, engagement and influence in foreign policy requires leadership from the top. The growing representation of Māori and other Pasifika peoples in senior positions in New Zealand's government sends a strong signal to MFAT, other government staff and stakeholders of the value of indigenous and Māori knowledge and perspectives.
- **Start at home.** There is a strong risk that "indigenous foreign policies" can be framed as a means of leveraging the diplomatic capacities of indigenous peoples as a resource, rather than creating equitable power and mutual respect. Drawing on indigenous knowledge in foreign policy therefore needs to be based on effective indigenous participation and ownership at home.
- **Protect staff time to build necessary skills.** Carving out ministry staff time to develop language and cultural competences is challenging but essential. Change also needs to go beyond written policy documents and communications, to permeate the entire organisation.
- **See incorporating non-Western worldviews and frameworks as an invitation, not a threat.** Part of incorporating non-Western approaches into practice is to understand that this is an opportunity to strengthen capabilities. Engaging with systems and frameworks that can change ways of working and behaviour in development co-operation has the potential to lead to more innovative and effective outcomes. Integrating Māori knowledge has facilitated new ways of understanding, and creates and strengthens partnerships, relationships and strategic thinking.

Further information

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To learn more about New Zealand's development co-operation see:

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Find more *In Practice* examples from New Zealand here: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning?submodel=in+practice&tag-key+partner=new+zealand#search>.

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