

Advocacy in the New Zealand Not-for-profit Sector: 'Nothing stands by itself'

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Abstract

This research focuses on government–not-for-profit (NFP) sector relationships, with particular reference to advocacy in New Zealand. It follows a study of advocacy in Australia by Onyx et al. (2009). There are concerns that NFP organisations in New Zealand have their advocacy functions curtailed by the requirements of government contracting and by decisions from the Charities Commission. This study looks at the kinds of advocacy activities that NFP sector organisations are involved in, the language they use to describe their advocacy and the reasons they give for the strategies they adopt. The study shows that advocacy methods are evolving, even though NFPs are increasingly self-regulating, and that NFPs need to find new ways to get their messages across in a rapidly changing context.

Keywords

Advocacy; not-for-profit; New Zealand; social sector

Introduction

The research goal of this study was to investigate the nature of government–not-for-profit (NFP) sector relationships, with particular reference to advocacy in New Zealand. The objectives were to identify and analyse:

- the kinds of advocacy activities used by NFP sector organisations involved in social and health promotion services in Auckland, Wellington and Waikato;
- the kinds of language used to describe these activities; and
- the reasons given for the strategies adopted.

Leaving aside the public health area, there is little information on the advocacy activities of organisations in the NFP sector in New Zealand. International research does not always transfer to New Zealand, due to its different history and culture and the size of its sector. Research by Onyx et al. (2009) analysed strategies used by NFPs in New South Wales and Queensland to promote advocacy, and considered the advocacy language used by NFPs and the reasons they adopt their strategies. As in New Zealand, the Australian environment in which NFPs operate has been greatly influenced by the government contracting the NFP sector to deliver social services, resulting in contractual relationships between government and the NFP sector. Individual NFPs are sometimes reluctant to openly and vigorously challenge government policies. However, Onyx et al. (2009) found that new strategies had evolved in New South Wales and Queensland to advocate for the marginalised. This paper builds on the work of Onyx et al. (2009) and compares advocacy in the New Zealand sector with the results of the Australian study.

Onyx et al. (2008: 632) define advocacy as 'active interventions by organisations on behalf of the collective interests they represent, that have the explicit goal of influencing public policy or decisions of any institutional elite' – as opposed to those activities carried out on behalf of individual clients.

This paper also focuses on NFPs that carry out service-delivery functions in the health and social sectors, as they are more likely to have contractual relationships with government. It is this area of complexity that needs to be studied.

Advocacy is important because it helps fulfil any stated constitutional role of organisations, furthers the advancement of participative democracy and strengthens civil society. According to Edwards (2007), a necessary aspect of civil society is its advocacy role, as played out in

the public sphere, where time and space are provided for public debate and education on social issues. In this way, Edwards (2007) argues, civil society has a major influence by providing a dense network of voluntary associations and a healthy public sphere, which helps to promote transparency, accountability, public pressure and the broad diffusion of power – all essential to democracy.

Advocacy, as a form of freedom of opinion and expression, is also a basic human right. Taking a rights-based approach to social service also implies the inclusion of individuals and groups in decisions that affect them (Chrisp 2011: 16). This reveals a tension in advocacy: how far are people supported to speak on their own behalf, versus an agency speaking for them? In this regard, Ife (2008: 174) further stresses the importance of citizenship obligations:

. . . it is also because of the idea of citizenship rights implying citizenship obligation for people to exercise their rights as citizens in a strong, active society, and the obligation to create the condition in which others are able to do the same.

Within the context of new public management theory, the tensions between independence and control of the advocacy role of NFPs is summed up by O'Brien et al (2009: 5): 'Historically and internationally, advocacy is a central role of many non-profit organisations. Performing this role can create tensions between non-profit organisations and government, particularly when non-profits receive a large proportion of their funding from the state.'

In the United States, Crutchfield & McLeod Grant (2008: 21) highlight the importance of advocacy as a key attribute of successful NFPs, as illustrated in the quote below:

High impact organisations . . . may start out providing great programs, but eventually they realise that they cannot achieve systemic change through service delivery alone. So they add policy advocacy to access government resources or change legislation, thus expanding their impact.

The New Zealand NFP Sector

Sanders et al. (2008), in analysing the New Zealand NFP sector, found it was a NZ\$9.8-billion industry, representing 4.9% of the nation's GDP and 9.8% of the workforce. The New Zealand NFP sector receives only 25% of its revenue from the government, compared with Australia's, which received 34%. Further, Tennant et al. (2006) argue that, in spite of the state sector predominantly providing health, education and welfare services, since the late 1930s the New Zealand NFP sector has also grown. This is due to a number of historic and political events, such as government funding even prior to the contracting system of various religious and welfare services, the growth of new community organisations to provide special social services for specific groups, and the development of Maori organisations with the formation of *iwi*- and *hapu*-based agencies and urban Maori authorities.

By the late 1980s, NFPs were active and ready to take on service contracts from government, which, twenty years on, have become an essential part of the delivery of state social services.

Government and NFP Sector Relationships

Since the 1980s, relationships between government and the NFP sector in New Zealand have been through a number of key phases. The *State Services Act* (1988) and the *Public Finance Act* (1989) clarified the concept and increased contracting and accountability to the state sector. Chief executive officers (CEOs) of government departments were now under contracts with the responsible minister. CEOs were required to meet purchase and performance agreements, which were linked to financial reporting. The requirement that the public service provide good, free and frank advice could be seen as less important than the requirement that it meet service specifications. Government preference for contracting with NFPs rather than providing grants-in-aid was part of the neoliberal agenda. O'Brien et al. (2009) identified three phases in government–NFP sector relationships. These are:

1. The 1980s to the mid-1990s: This period of rapid reform of social and economic structures introduced contracting regimes between government agencies and NFPs. Simultaneously, questions were asked within the NFP sector about the disparity of power relations between the two.
2. The late 1990s: New Zealand followed the lead given by Britain's New Labour government led by Tony Blair in recognising the need to nurture government–NFP relations as a key policy platform. As Giddens (1998: 78) suggested, 'The fostering of an active civil society is a basic part of politics of the third way.' Similarly, in New Zealand terms like 'social capital' and 'social cohesion' became part of the government lexicon.
3. 2000 to the present: The Labour-led government elected in 1999 took steps to rebuild the government–NFP sector relationship. The four key initiatives undertaken taken were:
 - i. The establishment of the Community & Voluntary Sector Working Party to report on the relationships and suggest improvements; this revealed NFPs' distrust of government and their exclusion from policy decision-making.
 - ii. The 'Statement of Government Intent', designed to improve relationships, was signed in 2001. In 2010, under the National-led government, this was replaced by a new accord: *Kia Tutahi*, which was promoted and signed by a number of NFPs and government.
 - iii. The establishment of the Office for the Community & Voluntary Sector, with the aim of building stronger relations over time.
 - iv. The establishment of the Charities Commission, under the *Charities Act* (2005), to register and monitor charitable organisations. In 2012 the Charities Commission was incorporated into the Department of Internal Affairs.

The non-registration or deregistration of around 120 NFPs (Barker & Yesberg 2011) by the Charities Commission caused deep concern

within the NFP sector. The two important tests applied by the Charities Commission that were not met to their satisfaction were:

1. The English *Charitable Uses Act* (1601), which sought to ensure that charitable resources were used for charitable purposes and which listed the types of charities at that point in time.
2. New Zealand court decisions, which require purposes to be beneficial to the community. On this basis, the Charities Commission has produced advice on the types of activities that could be said to provide benefits to the community.

These two tests are, however, restricted to activities that involve actually providing services or facilities. In March 2008 the Charities Commission adopted the England and Wales position that every charity must have a public benefit as its prime role in relation to advocacy.

An organisation qualifies for Charities Commission registration if its political advocacy activities are ancillary to its main purpose; that is, if it provides a service or facility. If the main purpose is considered political – such as addressing child poverty through advocacy – then the organisation would not qualify for registration. This has serious consequences for unregistered NFPs, such as loss of tax concessions. The Charities Commission's interpretation on this issue is considered to be 'narrow and technical' in an opinion by Chen & Barker (2011), law specialists to the Association of NGOs of Aotearoa. The opinion urges speedy reform of the *Charities Act* (2005), in order to broaden the interpretation of the definition of 'charitable purpose'.

At the same time, government agencies were providing advice and guidelines for correct contracting: Treasury (2001), the Office of the Auditor General (2006), the State Services Commission (2003) and the Ministry of Social Development (2006). Interestingly, the latter stressed the need for a return to greater flexibility and use of grants-in-aid for low-risk activities.

Advocacy Strategies

NFPs have used a variety of strategies to advocate for social change. Bradford (2004: 1) argued that:

Most NGOs worth their salt do have an advocacy role, whether it's making submissions to Select Committees or local Councils on relevant legislation and bylaws, putting out newsletters which critique Government in their policy area, making submissions in the local media or a host of other activities.

This point is supported by Driscoll (2009: 3), who stated that advocacy (to support a charitable purpose) can be extensive:

An organisation could testify on behalf of a charity at a public hearing on a law or policy; an organization could advocate for changing a law or regulation; it could organize a petition or letter writing campaign of its members or supporters to Members of Parliament, Ministers, or Government officials asking them to join a protest; or, it could organize a demonstration.

Samuels (2007: 185) agrees, noting that 'public advocacy is used to signify a broad sweep of practices, ranging from public relations, market research, and report writing to lobbying, public-interest litigation, and civil disobedience'. He goes on to argue that there are three typologies of public advocacy – political, managerial and technical – and that the one used will depend on the beliefs and backgrounds of people and organisations. One difficulty in engaging in direct lobbying lies in the cost for NFPs of gaining access to decision-makers at opportune times. Also, lobbying may not fit comfortably with many NFPs that want to ensure they are including members and clients in the process of advocacy.

Onyx et al. (2009: 46) argue that advocacy strategies can be viewed along a continuum between radical and institutional approaches. 'Radical advocacy,' they write, 'is associated with external democratic processes that are overtly political and therefore open to contestation.' Institutional

approaches, on the other hand are more elitist, involving only the executives of the two institutions: NFP professionals and government decision-makers. They point out that most approaches fall between the two extremes. According to Onyx et al. (2009), the danger of relying solely on institutional forms of advocacy lies in excluding clients, members and constituents from democratic processes, and using only elite professionals to represent their members' interests. This point is supported by Samuels (2007: 192), who said: 'If public advocacy is not rooted in grassroots realities . . . the voice of the marginalized is increasingly likely to be appropriated by urban (or international) elites who have the necessary information and skills.'

Blaiklock (2010), when executive director of the New Zealand Health Promotion Forum, suggested that approaches to advocacy should include building alliances and relationships within the sector, involving people's values, emotions and intellect, and including 'common cause' values such as responsibility towards one another and the natural world.

Public health researchers Casswell et al. (1993) noted that providing valid social research to policy-keepers does not necessarily change policy. They went on to argue that research should be methodologically beyond question, following which researchers have a duty to actively disseminate their results widely.

These approaches are consistent with the work of Onyx et al. (2009), which suggests a range of advocacy strategies, varying depending on the issue, on the nature of relationships and networks, and on the size and resources of the NFP organisation. In a wide-ranging review of advocacy networks, Acosta (2012: 164) notes their growing importance within the NFP sector. He states:

Local regional or national efforts to achieve policy changes are increasingly taking a 'softer' or more institutional tone, in contrast to a 'harder' or more radical one . . . This is partly due to the diverse commitments citizens' organisations have with local government, either in the form of funding or in co-participation for service delivery or assessment.

Acosta also points out the diversity of such networks and their growing skills in negotiation with external institutions.

Methods

This study draws on data collected from the most senior manager of eleven NFPs in the New Zealand community and social services sector. The study included three national/umbrella organisations, two social services organisations from the Wellington region, five from the Auckland region and two from the Waikato. The researchers both work part-time as academics, teaching not-for-profit managers, and part-time as independent practitioners and volunteers in the not-for-profit sector.

The research aim was to provide a national perspective, and so organisations were selected from three regions of the country. The researchers' believed that this spread would provide information on a range of advocacy strategies and activities. (National organisations are usually based in Wellington because of the ease of access to central government.) All the organisations included received funding via a government contract (in addition to other funding), employed paid staff, and had a positive reputation and some profile within the sector. They were identified through the researchers' networks and umbrella bodies. All of those which responded were involved in advocacy in some form or other, although all were also concerned to delineate funding for this from their government service-delivery contracts.

In line with the study conducted by Onyx et al (2009), the results presented here are derived from an analysis of the in-depth interviews and a questionnaire which asked all participants to identify the types of advocacy activities in which they were involved. The checklist, which was adapted from the study by Onyx et al. (2009), provided for five categories of activity: advocacy for clients, dealing with government, political change, legal change, and public benefit. Items listed in the questionnaire ranged from institutional advocacy, such as participation in government-sponsored consultation processes, to radical advocacy, such as organising a demonstration.

The interview data was first analysed according to the terms of the questionnaire, but, as in the Australian study, other discourses emerged that were not in the questionnaire. These included language concerning the market, networks and human rights, revealing a possible emergent form of advocacy as a reaction against legislative restrictions and learning from past actions. The results represent the perceptions of those included in the study based on their experience in their organisations, although the analysis does not identify the organisations or their personnel in order to protect their identities. Many of those included had many years' experience working in the NFP sector and involvement in advocacy.

Limitations

Relevant to the results of this study, we note that the interviews occurred during the latter part of 2011, ahead of and immediately after the November elections which returned a National government (which holds a neoliberal position on most social issues) for a second three-year term. The amalgamation of previous local government authorities into the new Auckland Council in late 2010 impacted on all the Auckland-based organisations. The results reflect the reality of organisations working successfully in this political landscape. They also reflect a 'more generic phenomenon that is explained as third sector responses to global capitalism rather than to particular national or local governments' (Kamat 2004, cited in Onyx et al. 2009). The results are not generalisable across the entire community and social sector because of the relatively small sample size. However, most respondents reflected on the broader advocacy and socio-political and economic environment in which they were operating.

Results

All the organisations that participated are engaged in advocacy in some way. The most salient emerging trend is that organisations are now far more likely to engage in institutional advocacy than take radical action. Most organisations never take part in demonstrations or rallies,

although several indicated that, historically, their protest activity was an important component of advocacy. Few now organise or promote boycotts or petitions or engage in other forms of direct action, although they have done so previously. Most use the media to promote their opinions, especially media interviews; over two-thirds use the print media, such as opinion pieces or letters to the editor.

All participants were actively engaged in relationships with government officials. They took part in sponsored consultation/advisory processes, made submissions to various government bodies, contacted public servants or politicians regarding particular issues, scheduled meetings with government officials to express views on a particular issue and sought government support for innovative projects.

In addition to public policy advocacy, all of the social services organisations advocated for individual clients. The most common issues for which clients received support were in securing benefit entitlements and housing. As noted by Crean and Baskerville (2008: 3), these two issues are often linked and are among the most common issues addressed in New Zealand social practitioners' advocacy work. While the majority of advocacy work is carried out by paid staff, support for individual clients was often done by volunteers.

All the organisations included provision of data relating to specific issues and were engaged in research activities. Interview data showed that evidence from research or compilation of data from service users was crucial to underpinning their advocacy. However, few organisations actually carried out research themselves, citing resource constraints as the main barrier to this, as the following examples show: 'We need to present hard evidence'; 'We can be very firm if we marshal information and have research behind us; then the government does listen'; 'We do a little research; research is a luxury we can't afford. Everything is a battle.'

One respondent expressed some scepticism regarding the recent reduction in government funding for social research. 'They know the more social research there is, the more people get informed, and they don't like that.' This quote also highlights the power imbalance between government and the NFP sector, as noted in the literature and discussed below.

Overall, organisations were less likely to be engaged in legal activities than any other category of advocacy. Just over 50% of participants have promoted legal action for or against a particular issue, but from the questionnaires it was unclear if legal advocacy was a current or historical activity.

From the questionnaires, it appears that organisations are wary of involvement in activities to promote political change. This was interesting, given the period in which the research was carried out, and possibly reflects the parameters of Charities Commission proscribed activities. Again, it is difficult to determine if those that indicated they encouraged people to vote for or against a particular issue or for particular candidates/parties had done so recently, or whether this was historical activity prior to the establishment of the Charities Commission. Given the proximity of the research to the national election, one interviewee indicated that they had prepared briefing papers for the incoming government on particular issues and for NFP organisations on contemporary issues.

The interviews added a more nuanced dimension to organisations' advocacy, and provided insights into how these organisations currently conceptualise, rationalise and describe their advocacy. This material is reported below.

The Language of Advocacy

Several participants noted that they have changed the language they use to describe their activities and to engage with government in the last few years. The need for discretion and nuance was noted in the following comments from participants:

The biggest problem has been to make advocacy more discrete and use coded language . . . while the preference is to be direct and accountable . . . has to make political judgements in order to secure the survival of the organisation and deliver services, more discretion is necessary.

If you are too strident or outspoken whether it is a real or perceived there is a risk of compromising our contract. This makes me very cautious.

Coded language may weaken the impact of advocacy for public policy change. The last quote also highlights a concern voiced by another participant that some NFPs are reluctant to speak out for fear of damaging future contracts. Whether it was a deliberate strategy or not, most participating organisations stressed that it was senior managers or the CEO who carried out their advocacy work, implying that this required discretion, sensitivity and with good judgement, as not only the organisation's credibility was at stake in relation to the positions they took on issues, but also potentially their contracts.

Agencies also struggle to gain an understanding of and to be able to speak 'the language of the market' and to find better ways of explaining the issues and what they do. One said: 'It took a long time to understand where market people are coming from. Their drivers are so profit-driven.'

Being seen as credible and being known to government was of importance to all of the organisations included in the study. One noted: 'If you have credibility you will be heard, but if it's a new issue it's hard to be heard. If the government doesn't know you, you won't be heard.' In speaking of barriers to advocacy, one noted a mismatch in worldviews or understanding of issues, saying: 'People don't listen to what you are saying or understand where you are coming from.' The need for good research was also highlighted. One participant believed that more research like the John Hopkins study would contextualise politicians' and public servants' understanding of contentious issues.

De-radicalising/Professionalising

Advocacy appears to be framed and influenced by the prevalent political ideologies. The participants' length of service in the sector enabled them to reflect on this. In discussing barriers to advocacy, one agency noted how the prevailing political ideology determined or restricted

their approaches. As they put it: 'The political feelings of the day or the government's views of the day determine our approach.'

The quote below builds on this, and reflects the continuum postulated by Onyx et al. (2009), with a move from radical to institutional advocacy: 'What we've done, we've moved from a radical group on the streets and have become pretty sophisticated at research and policy advocacy.'

Securing and maintaining government contracts undoubtedly determined and structured the type of advocacy organisations were involved in. Those that were less reliant on government funding appeared more confident in positioning themselves as advocacy organisations, and acknowledged advocacy was central to their work; however, one noted: 'We have no issues over advocacy; but we don't use the term "lobbying".'

Others were concerned that the utilisation of 'old-style activist activities' would damage their credibility, and so they have moved away from these: 'We have too much of an influential name, which you can't risk by getting arrested. There might be an element of getting older in this – but I think it's more strategic than that.'

Despite these reservations about their own organisation's involvement in more radical activities, the need and place of these was still considered an important information source and societal function (echoing Edwards [2009] and Ife [2008]). As one put it:

There are different forms of advocacy and it's all needed. Some groups are more radical than others and they should be able to do that without penalty or compromise to their status with the Charity Commission or their funding. They are also how policy is changed and we achieve a more just society. So now that voice has gone underground; how will the voice be heard? They should be able to express their opinions otherwise how do we hear from these people. The government needs to keep the doors open a bit so those who are willing to speak up can be heard.

Relationships with Government

Fostering and maintaining relationships with government officials and agencies was central to the work of the NFP managers interviewed, and determined their choice of strategies. All the organisations included were registered with the Charities Commission. Most indicated that registration was relatively straightforward, requiring minimal discussion or negotiation. Only one participant was reticent about discussing their registration or the negotiations required to enable them to register.

Several respondents noted that they had positive relationships with government officials and were listened to by them. Some differentiated their relationships with policy-makers in government departments, who were eager to hear of the detailed issues and impacts of policies on NFP clients, and their relationships with contract managers, with whom they negotiated their contracts for service: 'There is a collegial relationship at times with policy staff and they understand our values; but they are public servants under government control.'

Contractual relationships often left participants in a 'take it or leave it' position. Some noted that that contracts prohibited organisations from publicly criticising the government or government agency about matters relating to their contract, causing them to be cautious in their communication.

The introduction of 'High Trust' contracts by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), for a limited number of NFPs, has changed the nature of contracting for a small number of organisations in our sample.¹ To be considered for such a contract, a NFP must have a good track record and be a viable, well managed organisation – that is, be an integral part of their community, enabling them to work well with other agencies and demonstrate high performance.

Overall, the resource imbalances between NFPs and government agencies were acute. Often there was only one person in the NFP organisation responsible for managing and researching issues, whereas all government agencies had dedicated staff in each of these areas. Nevertheless, all saw all aspects of their relationship with government as a form of and forum for advocacy.

Sector Coordination and Cooperation

Participation in partnerships, networks, alliances and collective work was the accepted *modus operandi* for most in the study, especially in the advocacy arena. These relationships have taken on different organisational forms and varying degrees of formality, but all informants acknowledged that more could be achieved through collective rather than individual action. For at least one organisation there was open acknowledgement that working collectively had been a deliberate strategy of self-protection since the threat of funding cuts in the 1990s. There was also some suggestion that government ministers were only prepared to meet organisations collectively; they made it clear they 'were not interested in specific interest groups'.

Leadership rotated in these networks, depending on the issue and an organisation's particular expertise. At times, organisations provided data and information for others who were preparing position papers or submissions; at other times, they were the principal author of publications.

The increasing complexity and rapid changes in the sector over recent years made sector leaders more conscious of their positions and of the need to 'take the tail with them', while at the same time keeping themselves engaged with and informed by service delivery.

Advocacy Success

Participants readily spoke of their advocacy successes. Given their lengthy service in the sector (most appeared to have been involved for more than ten years), they were able to reflect on their success over time and through several government cycles. Most successful examples given took place during the period of the previous Labour government; this was also the time when NFP managers had most contact and influence with senior politicians or government officials.

Several respondents noted that, over time, they had needed to adjust their approaches and language in the face of evidence-based policy-making, shifting from a debate of issues in social terms to an emphasis

on economic discourse and analysis. As noted above, participants needed to learn to understand ‘the language of the market’, with their advocacy at a lower ebb now than five years earlier. Nevertheless, a number of organisations felt they retained some influence. One interviewee commented: ‘They had to dialogue with some of us who could actually talk their language, and I believe that modified them in a number of ways.’

Most participants viewed successful advocacy as that which changes or develops a government strategy or law. They took various positions within this, from mobilising community awareness around issues through to appointments on ministerial advisory panels. Within advocacy of this nature, developing their and their agencies’ credibility to the point that they were considered a sounding board or trusted advisor to either senior government officials or politicians often featured. Several also mentioned their work contributing to or being a catalyst for the establishment of government agencies or structures.

Other recent successes included increased funding to cope with unanticipated impacts of government policy changes or social media campaigns, or increasing public awareness of particular issues in order for them to be addressed at a policy level. Advocacy of this sort was based on research, with one interviewee noting that attention to a particular issue was ‘part of a broader social movement that is happening worldwide, and we are part of that movement’.

Interestingly, one respondent maintained that there was not one success story: ‘Nothing stands by itself.’ For this organisation, and the umbrella bodies, building the confidence and capacity of the community to respond to issues so they ‘can be their own advocate’ was an important hallmark of successful advocacy efforts, given the increasing complexity and diversity of issues facing the community and voluntary sector.

Funding for advocacy, however, is increasingly scarce. One respondent noted that ‘as we are a small country, all agencies are incredibly lean’, with organisations stretched to do ‘more than we’re paid for’.

Time constraints related to funding restrictions. One explained: ‘Time is a barrier; advocacy takes a lot of time. The board is very

supportive of me but there's a cost to being involved. There are hours of reading and the need to be away from work.'

While most examples given related to relationships with central government, a number of respondents noted their relationships with local government. With the formation of the Auckland Council in 2010, influencing local government and the formation of solid relationships of trust emerged as a theme in some Auckland-based agencies.

Discussion

Two notable differences emerge between this study and that of Onyx et al. (2009). The language of respondents in this New Zealand study was less militant or oppositional than that of their Australian colleagues. This could be because of the degree of familiarity NFP managers have with government officials and ministers. As Tennant et al. (2006, cited in O'Brien et al. 2009: 35) noted, New Zealand is quite different to Australia in that New Zealand NGOs have always had relatively easy access to MPs because of the small scale of the country, and the informal and often personal relationships between sector managers and politicians. Secondly, New Zealand's Mixed Member Proportional (MMP)² electoral system has increased opportunities for NGOs to engage with political processes, as it favours the formation of coalition governments and therefore increases the need for negotiation and some degree of compromise.

Our findings, however, support Onyx et al. (2009) in that we see that NFP advocates opt for a range of approaches, including the formation of new networks, to carry out advocacy on behalf of a wider group. There are likely to be further shifts in relationships as NFP operating environments become more complex and change rapidly. Similarly, advocacy will change as political ideology is reflected in the NFP sector's relationship with government.

The introduction of 'High Trust' contracts is a relatively new initiative. We believe that if the number of these contracts increases, there will be more opportunities for frank and open discussion with government officials about issues that affect families and communities,

but at the same time the move from radical to institutionalised advocacy will be further entrenched and accelerated.

Looking ahead, several respondents noted an increasing engagement with the private sector as a new avenue, target or ally in terms of indirect advocacy with government advocacy. The business sector could be considered an ‘institutional elite’; as described in Onyx et al.’s (2008) definition, which has shaped this study, it is a notable departure from advocacy traditions amongst social sector NFPs in New Zealand.

Human rights also permeated the language of several participants, perhaps heralding an increased awareness of the way in which international standards can be an aspirational position or a yardstick for measuring issues, and a means with which to hold governments to account.

Conclusion

Returning to the literature on advocacy, a key point made by a number of writers (e.g. Onyx et al. 2009) and our informants was the importance of hearing the voices of those most affected by change in society. It is the knowledge that agencies accrue from their on-the-ground work in communities which provides the strength of their voices, and what is sought by government agencies and MPs.

The literature highlights the impact of contracting within the public sector and its possible restrictions on government department CEOs providing free and frank advice to ministers. Those we interviewed believed that NFP contracting mirrors this. They see that changing political ideologies largely determine their advocacy approaches. We perceive that considerable risks will continue for those involved in advocacy, and predict that NFPs may feel increasingly inhibited in their advocacy in future.

It seems that NFPs’ language will be further modified and their approaches will move even further from radical to institutionalised. Further, as the Office of the Auditor General noted in 2006, we believe that genuine partnerships between NFPs and government are difficult to achieve within the current disparities of power and resources, leading organisations to seek a wider range of funding to ensure their

sustainability, or to invest more in their relationships and networking in order to underpin their advocacy efforts.

Overall, we conclude that being committed to advocacy needs to be entrenched in an organisation's culture, and supported and led at a senior management and governance level to ensure its efficacy and to achieve a fairer society for all. Further, our study highlights how advocacy continues to evolve, even though organisations are increasingly self-regulating.

NOTES

1. The key elements of high trust contracting are being relationships-based; being guided by key principles; and keeping a focus on what needs to be achieved.
2. In the New Zealand MMP electoral system, the overall total number of party members in parliament mirrors the proportion of votes a party receives in an election. It also allows for the inclusion of members elected by geographic electorate, who are deducted from the party totals so as to maintain overall proportionality. Each voter casts two votes: one for their preferred party and another for their preferred electoral candidate.

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