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Identifying land use options for networked Māori owned land blocks to deliver on collective aspirations in New Zealand

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Key words: [Indigenous land use, collective land, aspirations, extension]

Abstract

Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) have many opportunities and challenges to realise the potential provided by their **whenua** (land), **wai** (water) and **tangata** (people) to deliver to their goals and aspirations. The challenges are old and new, including environmental constraints, governance, geographic isolation, fragmented land ownership, access to finance, and lack of appropriate skills, knowledge, and networks. Extension programmes aimed at the general primary production sector have failed to attract or retain any or many Māori participants. Landowner to landowner learning built around landowner aspirations along with collective action has the potential to inform an extension approach of relevance to Māori. Shared knowledge and scale can enable the realisation of opportunities from networked primary production assets and people. A programme of work “Māori Agribusiness Extension (MABX)” is being undertaken where clusters, a grouping of Māori-owned land blocks or agribusinesses willing to collaborate or collectivise towards a common goal or agreed outcomes, are formed to enable collective learning to build confidence to implement land use change and support decision making. This paper describes the extension model being used and gives an example of one cluster.

Introduction

Agricultural extension involves sharing knowledge, innovation, and technology to implement change toward improving farming systems. In August 2019 the New Zealand Minister of Agriculture announced an ‘Extension Service Model’ with a four-year pilot programme to support more productive and sustainable land use practice in the agricultural sector and a shift to higher value production. Māori (indigenous people of New Zealand) freehold land (MFL) is intergenerational and held in perpetuity. An estimated 80% of the 1.18 million hectares of MFL suitable for primary sector use is considered unutilised, underutilised, or underperforming. Research suggests 55% of the 1.18 million hectares has potential for improvement, providing opportunity to deliver significant benefit to Māori and to achieve government priorities (MAF 2011). Research since 2010 (MPI 2013) indicates that access to primary sector expertise, and capability development opportunities for Māori agribusinesses are key to maximising the primary sector productivity and growth potential that exists within Māori-owned land. However, participation and retention of meaningful numbers of Māori landowners and agribusinesses (MAB) in previous extension programmes has been low. Research (Kingi 2009 a,b) has long identified challenges facing MABs that other agribusiness does not experience, particularly relating to Māori Freehold Land which has some inherent land productivity issues, due to land confiscation in colonial times, and requirements linked to Māori land law. Issues include complex governance, land administration needs, small or low productivity potential- land blocks, multiple / fragmented ownership, difficulty accessing finance and water, and more. These constraints have resulted in MABs withdrawing from past extension programmes. Landowner to landowner learning built around landowner aspirations along with collective action has the potential to inform an extension approach of relevance to Māori. Shared knowledge, networks, and scale of operations can enable the realisation of opportunities from networked primary production assets and people. A “Māori Agribusiness Extension (MABX)” programme is underway where clusters, a grouping of Māori-owned land blocks or agribusinesses willing to collaborate or collectivise towards a common goal or agreed outcomes, are formed to enable collective learning to build confidence to implement land use change and support decision making.

Methods

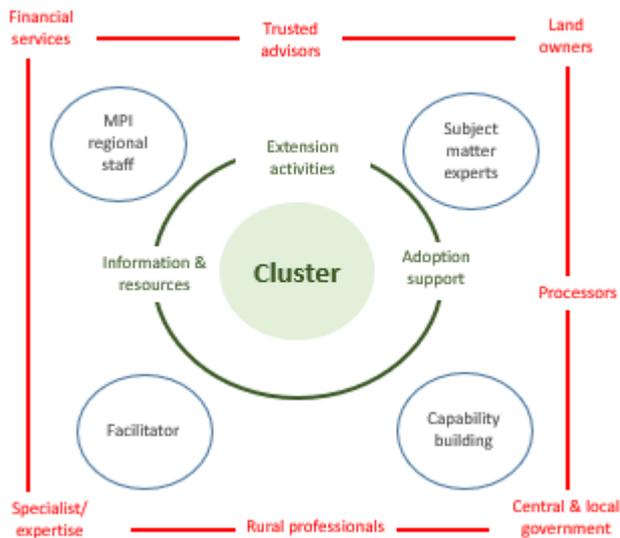
The MABX programme's *Whāinga* (Vision Statement) is *to grow the number of Māori landowners and agribusinesses to make confident, well-informed change to achieve their aspirations through their primary sector assets*. The *Kaupapa* (protocols) that the programme follows are: the extension services are tailored to the needs of Māori land owners and agribusinesses, with achieving their aspirations sitting at the centre of any plan; that advisors working in the regions, build trust with Māori landowners and act as agents of change and learning is enabled by regular monitoring and evaluation throughout the life of each project.

The programme provides support for Māori land owners and agribusinesses to **make confident and well informed decisions** for sustainable land use or system changes; uses a collaborative approach, **group support**, knowledge sharing and primary sector expertise to build the **capability and performance of participants** in the primary sector and implements activities **that equip farmers and growers with knowledge, tools, networks and support** needed to make their businesses profitable and environmentally sustainable, in a rapidly changing regulatory environment.

The extension model utilised by MABX consists of a cluster (made up of Māori landowners and/or agribusinesses). These clusters will have a common interest, purpose, or outcome in mind; usually land blocks are at a similar stage of development and the landowners will be looking to collaborate or collectivise.

The Ministry for Primary Industries Maori Agribusiness unit has a network of advisors situated within the regions who have close trusted relationships with Māori land trusts in their **rohe** (region). These regional advisors gauge the interest of land blocks to form a cluster around a particular interest. A two- phase approach is implemented, discussion group and cluster project. A discussion group is formed with the intention to work collaboratively to identify shared aspirations, sharing of resources including natural resources, people, infrastructure, and equipment etc., and potential collaborative agribusiness opportunities. At the completion of the discussion group phase a project proposal is developed by the cluster with an agreement to work together. Examples of discussion group topics that are currently being progressed include: a micro-mobile abattoir, sheep milking, regenerative farming, and high value horticultural crops. Once progressed to a project, each cluster is supported by an innovation system of actors (Figure 1). Key roles within the system are that of facilitator and project coordinator. The former must be able to utilise soft skills in drawing out the landowners to allow them to take ownership as well as an ability to access a wide network of technical expertise appropriate for the cluster needs. Many of these clusters are in remote, isolated parts of New Zealand and ensuring active participation by landowners requires much time in making contact and interacting as this may take place at multiple formal and informal settings. These tasks are best undertaken by someone from the local community and sufficient time allocated (4 days a week) particularly as the project is initiated. As part of the commitment to ensure the sustainability of the activities after the exit of the Ministry, a shadow facilitator role is put in place, filled by a local person. The shadow is mentored, on the job, by the facilitator and if required undertakes some formal training. Over the life of the project the facilitator will more and more hand over running of the cluster to the shadow.

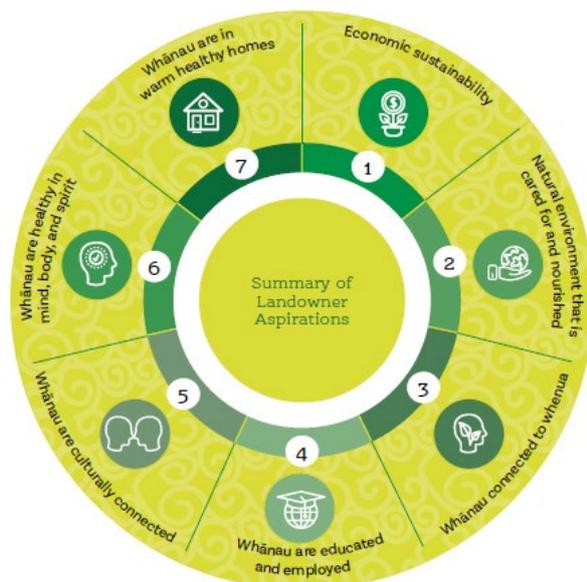
Figure 1 the innovation system of actors that support the MABX clusters.



Results

The following is an example of a cluster **Whangaparāoa Māori Lands Cluster**. This cluster has a focus on exploring land use options and developing capability. The total area of land in the cluster is 18,000 hectares made up of 27 land blocks. An inventory of the natural resources was undertaken by professionals including soils, topography, waterways, current vegetation, and overlaid climate data. 88% of the land use is steep hill country suitable for retiring and allowing reforestation of native trees or planting exotic plantation forestry. 12% of the land can be used for less intensive pastoral systems and 5% of the land is suitable for high value crops. The aspirations of the landowners were identified at **hui** (meetings) (figure 2) and reflect diversity that includes social, cultural, economic, and environmental. The aspirations are used to in the process of assessing the suitability of potential land use.

Figure 2 the aspirations of the landowners at Whangaparāoa.



Landowners identified 60 land uses of interest with this reduced to ten or so that were suitable for the local growing conditions including mixed cropping (e.g., kūmara, hemp, durable vegetables), truffles, avocados, hazelnuts, floriculture, and secondary compounds/bioactives from native plants.

This was followed by a series of **wānanga** (workshops) where experts interacted with landowners to explore in depth the potential for each of the ten or so crops. The programme continues with development of a business plan and capability development plan that will be used to identify potential investors, market partners, and training programmes.

Conclusions

Of importance to New Zealand are the cultural values held by Māori. Cultural values shape Māori worldviews, form the basis for decision-making, and are fundamental for establishing aspirations, desires, and priorities (Marsden 1975; Marsden and Henare 1992). Traditional concepts and beliefs still resonate strongly within contemporary Māori society. Cultural values therefore reflect both the long history and relationship **tangata whenua** (people of the land) have with a given area, location, catchment, or region and their world view, strongly influencing land use decisions. It is critical that the aspirations form a focal point for framing the conversation and work.

Key lessons to date have been the critical role of the regional advisor and the large amount of time required to set up the discussion groups and gain agreement on participants and topic. The importance of the landowners having a right of veto of facilitator and experts to retain ownership and build trust. Embedding monitoring and evaluation throughout the life of the programme helps guide success as does building in the ability to be flexible and adapting the programme of work to retain relevance as the cluster participants become more informed and identify pathways that they wish to explore.

Key challenges now include reaching out to the landowners who do not live in the area so that they are aware of the potential opportunities; inclusion of **rangatahi** (young people) as the decisions made now will directly impact on them as the next generation to manage the land and linking the potential opportunities to regional development in housing, health and making the location attractive to those rangatahi who will come home to run the agribusiness.

Acknowledgments

Note that all Māori words are in bold followed by a translation in brackets. We acknowledge funding for this work from the New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries. We also acknowledge all the regional advisors working in the MABX programme and the cluster participants. We particularly thank the Whangaparāoa cluster for sharing their knowledge with the global community.

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