

Ladies and gentlemen I only have 7 minutes please listen to me.

I came to New Zealand five years ago **knowing very little** about this country.

What I knew at the time is that we were at the **forefront of climate change**, making headlines worldwide.

That this was a nation **leader in the field of human rights**, with 70 million sheep, cows, lots of green pasture, Maori, Pacifica and a growing Asian young population, the All Blacks, the **word “give it a go”** meaning **fairness, opportunity**, hence a country of **great equality**. According to international standards, a nation performing very well in many measures of well-being.

There was even a woman Prime Minister when I arrived and something called the number 8 wire, batches and a blue bird by the name of pukeko.

I **started settling in**, spent the first few years much concentrated and determined to stay in New Zealand, especially after my **personal circumstances had changed**.

And **That’s** when my **eyes started to see**.

This was a **very much different New Zealand** than what I thought it was.

At the time, I was working and living in Auckland. I started to see high food prices, supermarkets concentrated in the hands of few oligopolies, political capture by corporate entities, farmers indebted and vulnerable, growing inequalities, children living in poverty, people struggling to make ends meet, decreasing sense of wellbeing, dual economies, serious breaches of collective rights, key defects in the law-making process, all in all not a lot of transparency, not the gender equality and the empowerment of women than I thought there was. **Loud and clear signs of an eroding democracy**.

But most important **I saw people talking** and **their voices not being heard**.

In Brazil **instead** some voices were heard. Heard in what is called **Participatory Budget**.

What is Participatory Budget?

A big name for a **simple idea** – that local people should be involved in making decisions on how a percentage of their local taxes are spent. It gave people a way of deciding on and selecting projects and services for their neighborhood. Residents and community groups make proposals and decide together which projects get priority in their area for the funds that are available to them.

The process first commenced in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1989, the first year of Brazilian democracy after years of military dictatorship. This, in response to community organizations' demands for greater inclusion in financial decision-making. The Porto Alegre experiment began modestly, with less than 1,000 voters in the first

year, though it quickly grew to 40,000 within a decade. Other cities around the world took notice of Porto Alegre's success.

And how does it work?

Participatory budget has primarily been embraced by municipal governments. Each city has a slightly different process, but the basic timeline is the same. Residents are invited to neighborhood assemblies, where they discuss problems and possible solutions funded by the city's discretionary budgets. Delegates take these concerns and research them, identifying existing efforts and figuring out how each solution could actually be implemented. They come back with detailed project proposals that the citizens then vote on. The top projects are sent to the city council for approval, though this step is usually just a formality.

What are the benefits for the city and its citizens?

One of their most important benefits is the **deepening of the exercise of democracy**, through the dialogue of public authorities with their citizens. Another benefit is that Participatory Budgets **make the state accountable** to its citizens and contribute to the modernisation of public management.

In **times of tight budgets**, local people have a say in targeting the resources to the services what matter most to them.

Whatever the reason, its impact is clear: people who have historically been **underrepresented in politics** in general are open to exploring this **new avenue of engagement with their local government**.

Now I come back to home. I see that we are very good to come up with solutions but continually have no idea how to do it.

How do we make this work?

How do we engage our people and make them decide?

How do we keep it simple?

How do I engage the people where I live?

TO LEARN MORE

<http://vimeo.com/71975359>

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