Lessons for Policy and Practice: A Review of the Third European Poverty Programme in Ireland draws together the key lessons from the operation of the EU Poverty 3 programme in Ireland between 1990 and 1994, and explores how the experience of Poverty 3 presents challenges for the future development of anti-poverty work.

The programme supported three projects in the Republic of Ireland. The aims were to test and develop new strategic and organisational approaches to tackling poverty at a local level and to contribute to the development of preventative measures for groups at risk of becoming economically and socially marginalised. This paper draws on a wealth of written material that emerged from the programme and provides a useful reference for readers interested in obtaining more detail on particular aspects of the programme.

The three model action projects supported by Poverty 3 in the Republic of Ireland were:

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Introduction

This paper summarises the lessons arising from the Third European Poverty Programme in Ireland and explores the implications of these lessons for other initiatives which foster economic and social integration and tackle disadvantage. The paper draws on the range of written material produced during the programme.

Poverty 3 began in 1989 and ended in 1994. The programme built on the experience of the first and second poverty programmes and focused on social exclusion and economic/social integration. The total budget was 55 million ECU over the five years of the programme. In Ireland, three projects were established:

- People Action Against Unemployment Limited, (PAUL), in Limerick
- Forum in north west Connemara
- Dublin Travellers’ Education and Development Group (DTEDG).

Another project - the Brownlow Community Trust - was established in Craigavon in Northern Ireland as part of the UK programme. The bibliography provides a list of publications produced by and about the projects during Poverty 3. This synopsis draws from these publications with a view to informing future anti-poverty work.

Aims of Poverty 3

The overall aims of the programme were to contribute to the development of preventive measures for groups at risk of becoming economically and socially marginalised and to develop corrective measures to meet the needs of people who were disadvantaged.

In essence, the programme provided the opportunity to test out new organisational and strategic approaches to tackling poverty at a local level. The European dimension of the programme allowed for the development and transfer of methods and know-how to address social exclusion and to the identification of good practice.

Key Principles of the Programme

The programme had three broad principles:

- **multidimensionality**
  involving the development of an integrated strategy at local level bringing together the range of partner interventions to provide a more holistic approach to social exclusion;

- **partnership**
  various public and private organisations agreeing jointly to engage in the implementation of a coherent strategy for the integration of less privileged groups in a chosen area;

- **participation**
  involving the population of the selected area in the work of the partnership.

The Projects in Ireland

The model action projects, PAUL, later known as (PAUL Partnership Limerick1) and Forum, adopted an area-based partnership approach to the work. This meant that each partnership focused on a specific geographical area and attempted to address disadvantage in that area through a range of interventions. However, they differed in that PAUL identified themes for implementing the programme and targeted four areas within the city. In contrast, Forum identified target groups like the young and the elderly within their catchment area and their work centred around these.

The DTEDG2 as an innovatory initiative developed a more flexible understanding of the programme.

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1 In 1991, Limerick was designated for inclusion in the PESP Pilot Initiative on Long-Term Unemployment. The PAUL partnership structure expanded its brief to take on the programme and changed its name to PAUL Partnership Limerick.

2 The DTEDG is now known as Pavee Point.
The main implication of the DTEDG’s work was a greater focus on processes and structures that fostered social exclusion.

**The Work of the Projects**

Each of the three projects identified a number of strategies to undertake during the time of the programme. *Figure 1* summarises the strategies of the projects and gives an example of one activity that was successfully undertaken during the programme.

The dissimilarity of strategies in the projects reflects the different approaches adopted by them to partnership. There were two distinct approaches; the formalised, area-based partnership model developed in PAUL and Forum and the strategic alliance approach of the DTEDG. Both of these models demonstrated degrees of success throughout the programme.

**Outcomes of the Programme**

The programme provided a considerable wealth of learning both at the practical level and at the policy level. The main lessons from the programme may be grouped under the following headings:

1. Operational Issues
2. The Programme’s Principles
3. National Policy Issues

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**Figure 1: Strategy and Activity of Projects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PAUL</strong></td>
<td><strong>Money Advice Project</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• community action centres to strengthen community capacity</td>
<td>had the dual aim of offering support to those in debt and promoting awareness of alternative credit options to moneylenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• education (to develop employment opportunities)</td>
<td>The project also made a direct input into policy formulation in this area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• information/welfare rights</td>
<td></td>
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<td>• family support</td>
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<td>• environment/culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>• research</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>FORUM</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rural Transport Initiative</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• integration of young people</td>
<td>a new private transport service linking the area to Galway city attempted to address the linkage between isolation and transport, particularly for the elderly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• integration of rural women</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• integration of excluded communities into the work of the project</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• integration of the elderly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• economic integration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DTEDG</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intercultural Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• development of anti-discrimination and anti-racist policies and practices</td>
<td>including school visits, seminars and inputs into schools, in-service training for teachers, exchanges with a European dimension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• achieving intercultural dialogue between travellers and non-travellers</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. Operational Issues

Organisational Structures
The organisational structure for Poverty 3 differed from previous poverty programmes in that it provided for Research and Development Units (RDUs) whose role was to animate the projects. Their existence proved valuable as they provided support for the projects during the lifetime of the programme. The need for support was seen to be crucial, particularly at the set-up stage.

In Ireland, the Combat Poverty Agency played an important role in the establishment of the projects and in supporting community sector involvement. They also fulfilled the functions of:
• co-financing the programme
• reporting to government on policy issues.

Management Personnel
The programme showed that a broad range of skills was required for management of a project because of the varied nature of the work. A number of changes occurred in management personnel during the programme and reflected the difficulties experienced in managing partnership. They also demonstrated the need for induction and training at management level, around partnership issues.

It was anticipated that rather than employing people with particular professional skills in the project, local people would be encouraged to work in either a voluntary or paid capacity. There was varied experience of this across projects. In future programmes the encouragement of local people to participate in the day-to-day running of the project should be built into the objectives.

Strategic Planning
A key aspect of the projects’ work was the design and implementation of a local plan which presented an integrated strategy of social and economic issues. This provided a good framework for action.

Transnational Exchange
Transnational exchange of ideas and experience provided the projects with a forum for sharing knowledge. This is of particular importance in any programme that tests out new ways of working, and should be included in other programmes.

Evaluation and Research
The experience of the programme suggests that the role of evaluation and research is crucial to the development of a project’s plan for the area and should be continued in future programmes. In Poverty 3 projects, research helped to highlight a number of priority areas and their experience indicated that resources ought to be set aside for this function of programme work.
2. The Programme’s Principles

A Partnership of Key Actors
The experience of the Poverty 3 programme shows that building a partnership from the ground up is the most effective way of developing broad consensus. It minimises the risk of competition between area-based groups by working through issues, and maximises the impact of all partners through integrated planning. It also highlights the value of forming strategic alliances at the policy level as for instance in the DTEDG’s work.

Partnerships, then, should be allowed to evolve locally, based on already-formed intimate networks of state, community, voluntary and social agencies and cultivated and, if necessary, expanded through a carefully-planned partnership process.

However, the findings suggest that there is a need to ensure that existing (often exclusive) power bases in communities are not simply being reinforced within new structures. The principles of multi dimensionality and integrated development cannot be abstracted from real people and actors within a community.

Multidimensional Strategy
Clear lessons emerge from the Poverty 3 experience of multidimensionality, and the implications of this concept for an effective approach to intervention.

An effective approach to tackling social and economic exclusion acknowledges the link between these two dimensions of poverty - and the need to address both dimensions in an integrated way.

It is also important to consider the policy and institutional environment within which these interventions are made. There are very good examples from the Irish Poverty 3 experience of how various social and economic dimensions of exclusion can be addressed through integrated strategies at local level. Being able to work effectively on all relevant dimensions is an important challenge to any future poverty programme.

Participation of Target Groups
The involvement of target groups was one of the main features of the programme. Experience suggests that further thought needs to be given to the involvement of target groups and highlights the following issues for future programmes:

- There is a need for broadening the experience of such programmes to a wider audience. Feedback mechanisms need to be developed between community directors and the target groups the programme is intended to serve. This will be particularly relevant in the case of the Local Development Programme partnerships where community consultation is a vital part of the strategic planning process.

- Although some capacity-building of local communities took place, the findings suggest that the impact of Poverty 3 on local communities was dependent, to a large extent, on the starting point of these communities in particular, and to previous capacity-building that may have taken place. Therefore, it is crucial that community capacity-building is resourced from the initial stages. It is important that communities receive ongoing, very specific training and support in future programmes.
3. National Policy Lessons

The extent of the impact of Poverty 3 is difficult to identify because of the range of concurrent and related developments such as the Area-Based Response to Long-Term Unemployment under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, the Community Development Programme, Horizon, NOW and Euroform. However, there are a number of issues that are evident:

Community Participation
The programme operationalised a model that was capable of understanding social and economic exclusion as inter-related processes and of instigating a response that tackled the effects of both.

It facilitated the development of the role of the community/voluntary sector in mainstream planning initiatives. The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and Area Development Limited (ADM) are national examples of efforts to promote community participation. In the case of NESF, the community and voluntary sector have representation alongside the statutory sector and the social partners. In the case of ADM, there is community sector representation on each of the local development partnerships, established under its role as the intermediary body with responsibility for the management of the Local Urban and Rural Development Programme 1994-1999.

Local/Regional Structures
The programme was less successful in bringing issues forward from the local arena into the public policy environment. This was due in part to the centralised nature of the Irish political system and the absence of a strong local or regional government structure. Trying to import a local partnership structure into a very centralised administrative structure can be problematic. It is questionable how local partnerships can develop without stronger local government structures. In future programmes the role of local authorities in area-based partnerships will have to be examined.

The experience of the programme shows that an openness is needed at national level to incorporate the lessons of a local initiative. While the partnerships in general worked well at project level, no partnership structure existed at a higher policy-making level to discuss the implications for legislative and political change. A number of changes can be identified which would help to create the kind of atmosphere at national level for this to happen:
• State partners need to agree a formal reporting and assessment procedure on social exclusion for their own organisations. The experience of Poverty 3 was that it was possible to get a high level of commitment from individuals in different government agencies but it proved much more difficult to get institutional commitment. This concept is currently being developed in the government’s National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS).

• The community/voluntary sector needs to be sufficiently resourced to make interventions into national policy decisions. The potential here is for new community technical support functions established under local area plans to fulfil this role.

• An appropriate mechanism is needed to allow co-operation between different government interests. This now exists in the form of the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee on Local Development which will have a role around the implementation of the NAPS. Experience suggests that effective partnerships require a cultural and attitudinal change from those involved. Partnership very often means doing things differently and this presents a particular test for partners.
Poverty 3 offers a number of challenges to the future operation of poverty programmes and other programmes charged with the aim of tackling social exclusion. These include in particular the need for a clear articulation of goals and strategies in relation to local development, social exclusion, and unemployment.

Performance Indicators
Experience shows that appropriate performance indicators are needed for the measurement of progress over time within any programme’s duration. However, it is sometimes difficult in anti-poverty programmes to identify qualitative results of the programme’s work.

Engaging the Social Partners
Future programmes should have to identify a strategy for engaging employers and trade unions more actively in the partnership process. Where social partners were included, (eg. PAUL in Limerick), the experience was that individuals were frequently engaged in the process but that the sector was not. There was no clear articulation by national organisations from the business/private sector or trade unions as to their role in local partnerships.

Blockages to Progress
The experience of Poverty 3 highlights a number of issues that need to be tackled centrally for anti-poverty strategies to work. These are:

• A lack of real commitment by agencies to partnership. In practical terms, the experience of Poverty 3 shows the need for separate criteria and indicators of progress to be developed for relevant government departments, relevant statutory agencies, support agencies, local statutory partners and their constituencies, and local community partners and their constituencies. Also, there is the danger that an ‘integrated programme’ can become little more than a number of similar but unconnected activities.

• There is a level of confusion caused by the overlap of many structures and programmes and the lack of co-ordination between them. Most national and European programmes have a partnership element to them and frequently programmes designed to tackle disadvantage lose their focus and become instruments of generic local development.

• There are difficulties in changing people’s mind-sets in relation to the partnership concept. Training at all levels and for every sector will help to overcome this.

• The short-term nature of public policy does not facilitate the longer-term development of partnership work. Future programmes will have to allow sufficient lead-in time and developmental work before results are sought. This was the case in Poverty 3 as the programme lasted from 1989 to 1994. The work of such partnerships is more long-term than any short-term programme will allow.
The Poverty 3 programme was an EU social experiment which attempted to test out new organisational and strategic approaches to tackling poverty at a local level. Effectively the projects operated as a testing ground for devising innovative responses to social exclusion.

The experience of Poverty 3 has provided better insights into the problem of poverty and social exclusion and how it might be addressed. In particular it provided:

• an awareness of the multidimensional nature of poverty;

• an awareness that while action at the macro-economic level is crucial, reliance on economic growth alone will not be sufficient to solve the problems, particularly of those who are most deprived and furthest removed from the labour market;

• an awareness of the need for and the value of partnership between all of the interests involved in addressing the problem;

• an awareness of the need for participation by those who experience disadvantage and poverty in drawing up and implementing policies if these are to be successful.

For future successful interventions in the struggle against social exclusion the following issues will need to be addressed:

**A National Strategy**

There is a need for a definitive written statement of policy in relation to poverty; government commitment to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) will play an important role here. Mechanisms like the government’s Strategic Management Initiative could be used to reinforce public agency commitment to combating poverty both in the context of NAPS and, generally, in future programmes designed to tackle social exclusion.

**Evaluation of Area-Based Approach**

The need for an examination of the effectiveness of area-based strategies in addressing disadvantage is also clear. Area-targeting poses some technical difficulties relating to the appropriate size of the target area and the correct spatial boundaries to be used. At an operational level, in Poverty 3 the model action projects covered geographical areas which did not coincide with the territorial units used in local government or other systems of public administration. This posed some difficulty in implementing local initiatives. The Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group (DTEDG) used a strategic alliance approach so that rather than having an area focus, the emphasis was on the needs of specific target groups.

There is also a general need for a continuing refocus of existing policies and programmes to ensure that a focus on social exclusion is incorporated.
References on Irish Poverty 3 Projects

- Partnership and Participation in Poverty 3, Expectation Versus Reality and the Way Forward, Conference of Community Representatives/Partners from the model action projects in Edinburgh, Limerick, Liverpool and Connemara.
- DTEDG, Submission to the Department of Health in Relation to the National Health Strategy, Pavee Point Publications, 1993.
- Tubridy, M., Community-led Sustainable Tourism in North-West Connemara, Natural Resources Development Centre, Éigse, Trinity College Dublin, 1993.

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*Economic Change and Development: Prospects for Peripheral Regions: Papers presented to International Workshop on Comparative Regional Studies, Queen’s University Belfast, September 2-4 1993.*


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