POVERTY TODAY

Supporting local action against poverty

Combat Poverty Agency
working for the prevention and elimination of poverty
The New European Programme Against Poverty

BRIAN HARVEY

A new EU Commission Communication entitled A New Social Policy for the New Economy is to be launched shortly by the European Social Affairs Commissioner, Anna Diamantopoulou. The communication will outline the future of European social policy for the next five years and how the Commission intends to support its development. It is hoped that the new policy will be formally adopted in the course of the French presidency, which begins in July 2000 and climaxes at the Nice summit on 7–8 December.

At the same time the long-awaited new European programme to combat poverty was approved by the EU Commission on 16 June. The Treaty of Amsterdam now gives the European Union the full legal authority to launch new programmes against poverty. The new programme will run from 2001–2005.

LISBON DISAPPOINTMENTS

The new Communication and the programme against poverty come at a time of a general setback in European anti-poverty policy. New, concrete targets were proposed by the Commission in the run-up to the last European heads-of-government summit, in Lisbon in March 2000:

- A reduction in numbers below the poverty line from the current 18% to 15% in 2005 and 10% in 2010;
- Child poverty to be reduced by half by 2010.

However, the heads of government did not adopt the targets, agreeing instead more vaguely to the co-ordination of national plans, with each government devising priority actions for specific groups. As their end-of-conference text stated: “The number of people living below the poverty line and in social exclusion in the Union is unacceptable. Steps must be taken to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and setting adequate targets to be agreed by the Council by the end of the year. Policies for combating social exclusion should be based on an open method of coordination, combining national action plans and a Commission initiative for cooperation in this field to be presented by June 2000 with the development of priority actions addressed to specific target groups (for example, minority groups, children, the elderly and the disabled) with member states choosing among those actions according to their particular situations and reporting subsequently on their implementation.’

THE NEW PROGRAMME

And what of the new programme against poverty? The €70m budget is much less than the proposed Poverty 4 programme in 1994, which would have spent €110m. The following is believed to be the outline of the new programme.

There will be three strands:
1. Research into social exclusion, helped by EUROSTAT;
2. Exchange of information and best practice, policy workshops and meetings between the member states and;
3. NGO strand: work with NGO-based projects on the policy issues of social exclusion, with an annual conference on social exclusion.

The draft programme stresses that the aim of the programme is to reinforce action against poverty at member-state level. It will not fund on-the-ground projects. The programme will be linked to European and national guidelines set for the reduction of poverty, benchmarks and systems of review which will be presented at the end-of-year summit in Nice in December 2000.

The four aims of the new programme against poverty, which does not yet have a name, will be:
- Improving the understanding of social exclusion;
- Improving policy cooperation;
- Developing the capacity of actors against poverty;
- Enhance the effectiveness of actions against poverty in the member states.

There will be regular exchanges of views between NGOs and social partners at the European level on the design, implementation and follow-up of the programme. The programme will be evaluated at mid-term, in 2003 and after its conclusion in 2006. The programme will be presented to the European institutions for approval this year, with launch in 2001.

The budget is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount (€)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>13m</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>2005</td>
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For the first year, the detailed budget will be as follows:

- Strand 1: Research: €4.2m
- Strand 2: Action by member states against poverty: €4.3m
- Strand 3: NGOs: €2.5m

The EU subsidy will generally be 80% of a given action (100% in the case of Strand 1).

CONCLUSION

Whatever the launch of the new social policy and the anti-poverty programme brings, it is interesting to note the views of the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, whose administration will assume control of the commission in July:

“Our first priority will be the adoption of a social agenda. We will not abandon the model of society which we have been constructing for half a century. A stronger, more competitive Europe is also a Europe of social justice. I would very much like the content of this social agenda to be ambitious – with a raised level of social protection, rights adapted to the evolution of work, an employment policy which takes account of changing industrial conditions, the fight against exclusion and against all forms of discrimination. To this end, we will define a work programme with a 5-year horizon with the European Commission and all the concerned bodies – government, European Parliament, social partners and associated bodies.”

Brian Harvey is an independent research consultant.
EU and UN Actions Strengthen Efforts to Combat Poverty

Hugh Frazer  Director of Combat Poverty Agency

Combating poverty and social exclusion effectively requires coherence between actions and programmes at a number of different levels: local, national, European and international. In recent years we have made significant advances at national level with the development of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). These are now being consolidated with the current review of NAPS and in the light of commitments in the new national agreement, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF). This should lead to new and enhanced targets and new programmes of action.

At local level there have been important initiatives involving community development projects and local development partnerships as well as many initiatives in areas such as education, health, housing and drugs. Additional coherence is now being brought to this level with the current reform of local government and the closer integration of local development and local government. The establishment of City and County Development Boards, charged with developing integrated strategies for the economic, social and cultural development of their cities and counties with a particular focus on social exclusion, is particularly important. It will do much to ensure a more integrated and strategic approach at city and county levels. This will be further enhanced with the rolling out of the NAPS and poverty-proofing to local level.

Important developments at EU and UN levels in the last few months will add a significant extra dimension to our national and local initiatives. At EU level the March meeting of Heads of State and Government in Lisbon launched an “open method of co-ordination” to “make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty”. Three ways of doing this were identified: setting adequate targets for poverty reduction at the Nice Summit in December 2000, drawing up national action plans and adopting a programme on poverty and social exclusion to be proposed by the Commission (under Article 137 of the EU Treaty). The Commission has since proposed a five-year action programme on poverty and social exclusion. The three core elements of this action programme are: improving understanding of and data on social exclusion; organising policy co-operation and exchange of best practice in drawing up national action plans; and supporting and developing the capacity of NGOs and others to address social exclusion and to network effectively. Over the next few months it will be very important that these initiatives are developed to their full potential. This will mean agreeing challenging and meaningful anti-poverty targets, increasing the relatively modest budget proposed by the Commission for its action programme and establishing a co-ordinating mechanism at EU level involving senior Commission officials, representatives of the European institutions and the social partners and NGOs to monitor, advise and report on the development of national plans and on progress in reducing poverty across the EU.

At UN level the recent special session of the General Assembly in Geneva, World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Achieving Social Development for All in a Globalizing World, built on the Copenhagen World Summit of five years ago and in particular reiterated the commitment to eradicate poverty in the world through decisive national actions and international co-operation. Significantly, the accompanying programme of action reinforces the Irish approach of setting targets and goals, developing comprehensive national strategies and integrating policies at all levels. Amongst the various actions proposed is “encouraging Governments to re-evaluate, as appropriate, their national fiscal policies, including progressive tax mechanisms, with the aim of reducing income inequalities and promoting social equities”. This sits well with the commitment in the PPF to poverty-proof the tax measures in future Budgets but also highlights the need for us here in Ireland to give more attention to the issue of income inequality.

If all these developments, local, national, European and international are implemented to their full potential they will reinforce each other. This will contribute significantly to the eradication of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland.
Programme Notes
Understanding the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness

SÉAMUS Ó CINNÉIDE

PROGRAMMES OF LONG AGO

We have had national Programmes in Ireland for over forty years. The first one, the Programme for Economic Expansion, was published in 1958 and is generally regarded as marking the beginning of the modernisation of the whole of Irish society. In the sixties there were two further programmes, the Second Programme for Economic Expansion (1963) and the Third Programme: Economic and Social Development 1969–72. They represented two significant advances. Firstly, consultation with the major economic interests, what we now know as the social partners, became an accepted part of national planning; secondly, an attempt was made to broaden planning to include not just economic objectives but social objectives as well. After the Third Programme the idea of programmes was temporarily abandoned.

At the end of the seventies a Department of Economic Planning and Development was given statutory responsibility not just for economic planning, but for social planning as well and the Programme for National Development 1978–81 was published. This marked the transition from indicative planning to national strategic planning, defined by NESC, which published many reports on planning, as follows:

“National strategic planning would necessarily involve the selection of a small number of central objectives. Programmes would be designed and co-ordinated to achieve these objectives and resources would be allocated accordingly. Targets would be set with a time scale and progress would be carefully measured so that changes could be made as necessary. Because of the close interrelationships between economic, social and physical planning, not least in connection with funding, these aspects would need to be integrated in the strategic national planning process.” (Report no. 68, 1982).

THE PROGRAMME FOR PROSPERITY AND FAIRNESS

In attempting to review the new Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) I wanted to set it in this, historical, context firstly to make the point that we have been doing this kind of “programming” now for quite a while, and, secondly, to provide a contrast between the simplicities of the past and the complexities of the present.

We can all agree that it is better to have a government policy programme than not to have one. National agreements, guaranteeing predictability in relation to incomes (though not restricting the highest earners) and stability in industrial relations, have served us well. But the accretions to these national agreements over the decades have now led to the production of a document that is absurdly complex and intelligible only to specialised reader: a 130-page, 50,000-word document with five “Operational Frameworks”, 42 policy chapters, five different kinds of “partnership”. It was launched on 7 February 2000 with great razzmatazz, and though it has been summarised it has not been adequately explained or reviewed.

I can only make three points here: firstly that the PPF is too ambitious; secondly, conversely, that it is not ambitious enough; and thirdly that social policy gets a poor deal.

THE PPF IS TOO AMBITIOUS...

The PPF tries to do too many things at once. It has five distinct components, though not labelled as they are here.

Its first and main component is the “Draft Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Employment between the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Employers’ Organisations”, and the associated agreement on public service pay. This is the bit that guarantees economic stability and a favourable environment for entrepreneurship and investment; this is the very milk that nurtured the Celtic Tiger, we are told.

The second component is a series of agreements between the two social partners, employers and labour, about working conditions, industrial relations and how businesses should be run for efficiency, productivity and worker contentment. The contents of these agreements are suggested by EU policies, political correctness and global imperatives. They include, in addition, proposals in relation to the care of children of working parents. So far so clear.

The third component are tax and social security measures affecting people’s standards of living, guaranteed by government as sweeteners to enable the social partners to reach agreement.

The fourth is a whole litany and mixture of policy ambitions and initiatives. Over
thirty years ago, when the drafters of the Third Programme were trying to add a social development dimension to what was essentially an economic programme they did it by cutting and pasting lists supplied by the social departments, of the latest bright ideas. Such lists did not then represent the results of, or the basis for, a plan. But the list system is still being used in the PPF.

Lastly, there is a whole lot of stuff about SMI and partnership, on how state bodies and organised interests should work everything out together away from the political arena.

These last two components are the least satisfactory and the least discussed aspects of the PPF. One is a poor substitute for overall social planning; the other is a means of getting a commitment to a policy agenda with the minimum of public discussion and explanation. These five components, only some of which are logically connected, make the PPF too complex and overstretched.

...BUT NOT AMBITIOUS ENOUGH

In introducing the PPF the Taoiseach said that it “outlines a comprehensive series of integrated economic and social objectives. It sets out the path through which we can achieve economic prosperity and fulfil our economic goals”.

In other words the document is presented as a national strategic plan, even if that term is not used.

The words comprehensive and integrated are important: this is intended to be the overall policy plan for the next three years. But we know that that is not so, that there are other “plans” which are significant too. Two of the most important are the National Development Plan 2000 – 2006 (NDP) and Sharing in Progress: National Anti-poverty Strategy, 1997 (NAPS). The PPF refers to the NAPS and the NDP, but all these different documents were arrived at by different means, with different participants involved over different lengths of time, and each one refers to a different period.

The PPF is neither comprehensive nor integrated and therefore does not meet the basic criteria for national strategic planning which were the subject of so many NESC reports in the past. Has national strategic planning been abandoned? Is it no longer feasible? It certainly cannot be accomplished over ten weeks in the hothouse of Government Buildings. The danger is that the plethora of existing plans can lead to negative reactions to the very idea of planning, either cynicism or resignation.

THE PPF AND SOCIAL POLICY

One of the great successes of the national programmes over the past twenty years has been the improvement, against European trends, of social welfare rates, at the insistence of ICTU and with the inspiration of the 1986 Report of the Commission on Social Welfare. This was no negligible achievement. However, we all know that the challenges to social policy in Ireland go beyond that. We live with huge anomalies and injustices in education and in the health services; many groups, including old people, children, people with disabilities, are denied basic rights that should be guaranteed in a highly prosperous twenty-first century society.

These challenges are not addressed in any coherent or comprehensive way in the PPF. Such discussion as there is is related to banalities about “inclusion” and “equality”, disputed terms which need to be defined for the purpose of the moment and operationalised, i.e. expressed in terms of aims and targets that can be reviewed and evaluated.

Without such a rational approach all we can hope are the lists of proposed actions. For older people we have a paltry six actions (page 97); for children we have a four-line paragraph on page 95 and a passing reference to “child poverty” on page 79. There is an elaborate three-page chapter on “Childcare and Family-Friendly Policies”, sandwiched between one on “Labour” and one on “Information Society”. This chapter is not about child welfare in general or about supporting in a general way families under strain, but is driven solely by the imperative of getting women into the workforce. This is an entirely valid and worthy objective but has no necessary connection to issues about what is good for children. At the PPF table who was looking after the children?

It is, of course, easy to be critical, but if the PPF does not include the essential elements of planning not just for the Irish economy but for the Irish people, then where is such planning to be found?

Séamus Ó Cinnéide is Jean Monnet Professor of European Social Policy at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.
Direct Provision - A Recipe for Social Exclusion

PETER O’MAHONY

In late 1999, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform introduced the practice of ‘dispersal’ of asylum-seekers to towns and villages outside Dublin. This was usually to collective full-board accommodation such as hostels. A system of ‘direct provision’ was simultaneously introduced and became official policy in April 2000.

At the same time, in the UK, the Home Office removed all remaining cash payments for asylum seekers, who now receive vouchers worth £35 per week, to be spent in designated stores. The Irish government maintains that a failure to harmonise their reception strategies with the UK would result in another “pull factor” to Ireland for asylum-seekers.

THE DIRECT PROVISION SCHEME

Prior to the scheme’s introduction asylum-seekers had been receiving Supplementary Welfare Assistance (SWA) of £72 per week, were eligible for rent allowance and were permitted to live in private rented accommodation where they were responsible for their own cooking arrangements.

Under the direct provision scheme, along with some discretionarly payments, asylum-seekers get full-board accommodation and an allowance of £15 a week per adult and £7.50 per child. They are, with few exceptions, not permitted to move into private rented accommodation. As a result they are left with no alternative but to remain in emergency accommodation such as hostels, B&Bs and guesthouses and are deprived of the independence and opportunity that being responsible for their own cooking and domestic arrangements would provide.

While many organisations were supportive of the principle of ‘dispersal’, church bodies, NGOs, political parties, trade unions and refugee groups are largely unified in their opposition to direct provision.

WHAT THE SYSTEM MEANS FOR ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Asylum-seekers face the sorts of barriers experienced by indigenous socially excluded people, however, they must also confront additional obstacles, as they do not have the right to work (unless they have been here at least 12 months and meet certain other criteria), to attend full-time education or to travel. Many are unaware of their basic rights and live in an atmosphere of uncertainty. Indeed, there is a general feeling of disempowerment among the asylum-seeking community.

• Direct provision is a discriminatory measure which socially excludes asylum-seekers from their surrounding milieu. By way of example, the small cash benefit they receive – often referred to as ‘comfort money’ – leaves them with little or no opportunity to interact with host communities. Feelings of depression and boredom are common. These are often compounded by memories of persecution experienced in their country of origin and are aggravated by not being permitted to cater for their dietary needs. Many asylum-seekers, especially those in a rural setting with poor public transport, feel isolated. The situation is further compounded by the hostility expressed by certain sections of local communities, in part arising from a lack of information provided before ‘dispersal’.

• The direct provision scheme fails to guarantee the basic needs of children. Those who live in hostels and other forms of crowded non-family accommodation may experience integration difficulties, educational barriers and additional health-related needs. Moreover, their ability to take part in communities of children will also certainly be affected.

• In other countries, e.g. Germany and the UK, it has been shown that direct provision is economically unsound and overly bureaucratic. It has also been argued by human rights groups in Ireland that it may be incompatible with Article 40.1 of the Constitution, which states that all persons are equal before the law. By implication, it is felt to mean that destitute non-nationals and destitute nationals should not be treated differently.

• Finally, direct provision flies in the face of the principles of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which guarantees the rights of minorities and encourages self-reliance through respecting individual dignity, through promoting empowerment and ensuring equal access for all. Direct provision needs to be poverty-proofed in view of these principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an acute need for policy-driven research into the circumstances of those affected by this scheme. The experiences of children must also be included in terms of their basic human rights and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The problematic and unjust nature of direct provision needs to be exposed and the obligations of the state in relation to asylum-seekers upheld. In conclusion, direct provision can be seen as an assault on the human dignity of asylum-seekers and, accordingly, should be discontinued.

Peter O’Mahony is Chief Executive of the Irish Refugee Council.
Perception is Power: Social Exclusion and The Media

EOIN DEVEREUX AND AMANDA HAYNES

The media plays an immensely powerful role in shaping public perceptions of the poor and the socially excluded. Often, it is the only source of information on groups experiencing social exclusion for many people, and thus may be significant in influencing public policy responses to the poor and the excluded. This article examines a recent project – the Integra Media Forum – which looked at how the Irish media cover issues of social exclusion and poverty. The project involved extensive media monitoring as well as an examination of how media professionals perceive social exclusion. The Project report, entitled Perception is Power: Social Exclusion and the Media, produced a range of practical recommendations on how media coverage of these issues could be improved.

On 15 May, as part of the launch of the ‘We can’ initiative, the Combat Poverty Agency and the Equality Authority announced that they plan to organise a regular media forum to examine the representation of social exclusion and poverty issues by the Irish media. The impetus for such an announcement lies in the publication of the Integra report. In this article we outline the background to this innovative project, highlight its main recommendations and speculate on the role and direction that future media fora might take. ¹

THE INTEGRA MEDIA FORUM PROJECT

The project represented a unique opportunity to gather information on how social exclusion issues are perceived, and reported upon, by Irish media professionals. The Integra Media Forum Project consisted of an eight-week period of monitoring of social exclusion coverage in the national print media; a closed session with media professionals under the chairmanship of Professor John Horgan (DCU) as well as an open session where representatives of Integra projects discussed their experiences of dealing with the media. Information was gathered from media professionals by means of a brief questionnaire and follow-up interviews. One interesting aspect of the project is that participants agreed to engage in a process of self-monitoring on how they and others covered social exclusion after taking part.

The media forum was seen by the participants as an important and rare platform in which many significant issues, more often than not ignored in the day-to-day world of journalism could be discussed. The interviewees were overwhelmingly positive about the usefulness of the media forum as it gave them the opportunity to take the time to examine the media’s role in the coverage of social exclusion. The resulting report details the many constraints facing journalists in reporting on social exclusion. Notwithstanding these constraints, the media professionals interviewed had many practical and concrete suggestions for the voluntary sector in terms of how they could improve their relationship with the media and gain more effective media coverage.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The report contains a number of key recommendations for future action. As well as recommendations on the resourcing of community and voluntary groups and the provision of future training for media professionals on the theme of social exclusion, the report recommends that ‘Right of Reply’ mechanisms for the socially excluded be investigated. It is suggested that future research be undertaken into how organisations like the Australian Press Council deal with complaints from individuals or groups who feel aggrieved by negative media coverage.

However, the recommendation given greatest priority in the report is on the future provision of media fora. The report suggests that a media forum be held on a regular, perhaps twice-yearly, basis in order to facilitate greater debate and discussion amongst media professionals and amongst the voluntary and community sector. In order to ensure the productiveness of these sessions, it is proposed that each forum will address a specific aspect of the coverage of social exclusion and will be informed by preceding media monitoring. In this way, its work can progress beyond the general, to engage with explicit issues, which are potentially more susceptible to change. Future fora might also target specific categories of media professionals, for example sub-editors, and issues of particular relevance to them.

The mainstreaming of the media forum concept represents a vital step in effecting change in how the media reports on social exclusion and its effects on both public opinion and public policy responses.

Eoin Devereux is Lecturer in Sociology, Department of Government and Society, University of Limerick. Amanda Haynes is Assistant Lecturer and Ph.D. candidate in the same department.

¹ The ‘We can’ website – www.wecan.ie – contains the full text of the report.
The overall aim of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland is: To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment; promoting urban and rural regeneration; developing cross-border co-operation and extending social inclusion.

Area Development Management Ltd and the Combat Poverty Agency (ADM/Agency) are jointly responsible for the implementation of 13 measures of the Programme across the southern border region. ADM/Agency also jointly manage a cross-border community reconciliation measure in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust. The ADM/Agency segment of the Programme has broad objectives, with social inclusion, socio-economic progression and cross-border activity forming the building blocks for peace-building and reconciliation.

**THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION**

In implementing the Programme, ADM/Agency have sought to explore the processes of peace-building and reconciliation in more depth. Important elements of this work have included a Reconciliation Awareness and Training Initiative and an investigation of the role of reconciliation within the school. The Initiative resulted in the publication by ADM/Agency of a ‘Reconciliation Report’ highlighting the main issues and challenges of reconciliation in the context of the southern border counties. Reconciliation matrices (See Table 1) developed as part of this work, also provide a useful framework for the examination of some key issues arising from the Peace Programme and will form the basis of peace-building work in the future.

**FURTHER KEY ACTIONS**

Building consensus through discussion and debate is a key Level III action for reconciliation. This cannot happen without the establishment of a significant level of trust among groups and between organisations at all levels. It has been the experience of all those involved in the Peace Programme that the amount of time this process will take should not be underestimated. Changing structures and cultures to accommodate diversity and pluralism – the key Level IV activity – will take longer again as it depends on the willingness of those involved to acknowledge their weaknesses and engage in a meaningful process of change.

Such processes of change are closely related to the whole issue of sustainability. The short-term nature of Peace funding makes sustainability a critical issue both for projects supported by the Peace Programme and for ADM/Agency. Mainstreaming innovation and learnings from the Programme, both practical and institutional, will provide a means through which actions can be sustained and further developed. (The Border Counties Childcare Network provides a good example of where work piloted by ADM/Agency has been mainstreamed as part of the new National Childcare Strategy.) As a part of this process ADM/Agency are planning an analysis of learnings based on a series of 14 case studies. They also plan to use this information to target mainstream development programmes and decision-makers in an ongoing effort to change structures and cultures.

**CATHY WALSH**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Reconciliation Levels</th>
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<tr>
<td>Level I</td>
<td>The creation of basic contact/awareness/understanding;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>The development of Joint Projects that involve shared activity;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Addressing issues of conflict;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>Joint activity to change structures and cultures toward greater pluralism.</td>
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**KEY LEVEL I ISSUES**

These relate to creating the necessary conditions, in particular in terms of confidence levels among groups, to enable them to engage in the process of making contact, moving on from consultation towards more meaningful participation. This, in the experience of ADM/Agency, involves the provision of a range of significant additional supports: providing practical training, seed funding to help organisations develop plans based on need and to gain credibility with other organisations and funding agencies and facilitation support. A recent overview of the operation of the Programme found that a significant amount of time and resources are required especially to support the key Programme target groups in particular, since they were less likely to come forward for support particularly in the early years of the Peace Programme.

**JOINT PROJECTS**

The development of partnerships among groups and between the statutory and voluntary sector is an important Level II issue. This process takes a considerable amount of time and groups that received management training and mentor support are better equipped as a result to engage in this process. Another important spin-off of this process was identified in a report, *Border Crossings: Lessons from the Peace Programme*, produced jointly for ADM/Agency, NIVT and Co-operation Ireland. Cross-border projects in particular provided opportunities for networking between groups and agencies across the border.

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For copies of these documents, please contact: monaghan@adm-cpa.com
A Learning Network for Local Government

JULIE SMYTH

Sharing in Progress, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy’s Statement proposes that “...social inclusiveness and equality of opportunity will be fostered through a renewed system of local government.” As part of its work to support and promote NAPS, the Combat Poverty Agency is also involved in developing anti-poverty strategies within local government. As stated in Sharing in Progress, “The Agency will be particularly called upon to advise on anti-poverty strategies in the context of the local government reform process.”

In addition to the Agency's role, The Report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development is premised on an enhanced role for local government in tackling disadvantage and promoting social inclusion. The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness contains a commitment to strengthening NAPS and extending it to local government. In addition, the pursuit of social inclusion is a core objective of the National Development Plan. These policy commitments provide a clear focus on tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion within both central and local government in the next few years.

A PROGRAMME OF WORK

In September 1999, an advisory committee was established within the Agency to assist in the development of a programme of work to promote anti-poverty strategies within a reformed system of local government.

Representation on the committee included the Department of the Environment and Local Government, the Community Workers Co-op, the NAPS Unit, directors of Community and Enterprise, the Integrated Services Project, the Peace & Reconciliation Programme, local authorities, Partnerships, IPA, and CPA board and staff.

As a result of its deliberations, the Agency is now in the process of establishing a local government Learning Network, in collaboration with the Department of the Environment and Local Government and the NAPS Unit. The aim of the Network will be “to promote and support the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within a reformed system of local government.” In particular the Network will:

- Provide a forum in which local authorities can share experiences and consider how to make the maximum contribution to policies to tackle social exclusion within the context of national policies;
- Support and assist local authorities to incorporate a strong anti-poverty focus within their work.

Emphasis will be given to work by local authorities which:

- Identifies characteristics of NAPS relevant to local level, tests elements of the strategy at that level and builds links between local anti-poverty action and national-level strategies;
- Develops integrated and co-ordinated approaches to addressing poverty at local level and ensures systems are developed to prioritise combating poverty;
- Involves people experiencing poverty and those that represent them in the design and implementation of plans and strategies.

Members of the Network will have the opportunity to share information, knowledge and models of good practice within local government. In addition, they will be able to identify members’ training and support needs to progress anti-poverty work. It is further envisaged that members’ capacity to access resources and expertise on anti-poverty action, research and analysis, community development and relevant policy developments will be enhanced.

This progress will be achieved by organising seminars/workshops through which the core work of the Network will be advanced, allocating resources as available for piloting key elements of anti-poverty strategies and the provision of information, support and training.

THE MEMBERS’ ROLE

Members of the Network will be expected to commit themselves to contributing to:

- The development of a strong anti-poverty focus within their local authorities;
- Internal and external dissemination of information and learning;
- Active participation in the Network;
- The involvement of elected representatives and officials within their local authority;
- Involvement/dissemination across functional areas within their local authority;
- Releasing relevant staff for seminars, training etc;
- Resourceing members as appropriate, (eg. travel and subsistence and staff time);
- On-going education and training in relation to anti-poverty work.

It is anticipated that an initial meeting will be held before the end of 2000 where a draft programme for year one of the Network will be discussed. It is intended to establish a support group of key national agencies to assist the development of the Network. Applications will be invited from local authorities, on a corporate basis, which support the aims of the Network and are prepared to make an active commitment to its work and development.

Julie Smyth is Projects Officer with the Combat Poverty Agency.

For further information on the Learning Network contact smythj@cpa.ie.
Developing A Local Anti-Poverty Strategy

JANICE RANSOM

The Community Workers Co-operative (CWC) is currently undertaking a project funded by the European Commission under the Article 137 Preparatory Actions to Combat Social Exclusion budget line. This project, "Developing Strategies and Methodologies to Combat Social Exclusion", aims to develop specific, innovative policies and related methodologies to be undertaken by local authorities to combat social exclusion. The project has partners in three European countries: Portugal, Sweden and England. Each partner is focussing on one distinct area of policy in collaboration with one local authority in their own country. In Ireland, this is Offaly County Council.

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF PROJECT

Under the terms outlined above, the project’s objectives include to create and promote “demonstration initiatives” which can be replicated by other local authorities; to develop policies in an integrated, multidimensional way, rather than simply at project level and to involve NGOs, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders in the development of these policies, ultimately linking into the national arena. The outcome of these objectives will then be fed back to the EU Commission and a strategy guide published, ensuring that models of best practice are widely disseminated.

ADDED VALUE OF TRANSNATIONAL WORKING

The Community Workers Co-operative firmly believes in the added value of the transnational elements within the work of this project. The opportunity to hear and share experiences with our European partners plays an important and enhancing role in the project. The transnational element is managed in a number of ways: the project manager within Ireland provides ongoing support through e-mail and phone contacts and there are transnational support visits providing an opportunity to share experiences and to exchange information on other policy issues concerning social exclusion and poverty.

PROJECT ACTIONS WITHIN IRELAND

The aim in Ireland is to identify the methodologies required to develop a local anti-poverty strategy in partnership with Offaly County Council. Given the time and resources available, the strategy will not be comprehensive but will represent a first step for the county and a model that other authorities can learn from and/or replicate. The work of Offaly County Council and the Community Workers Cooperative is particularly timely, given the commitment in the National Development Plan to the development of social inclusion packages, the agreement in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness to embed the existing National Anti Poverty Strategy in the actions of local authorities and Health Boards and the Government’s decision to pilot a number of special social inclusion units in local authorities. In addition, urban and rural disadvantaged areas have been targeted to receive additional resources, and the core role of County Development Boards to tackle social exclusion and to develop County Strategies has been recognised.

The Offaly County Council/CWC project is managed by a focus group. Its first task was to recognise that one of the key elements, when developing a local anti-poverty strategy, is a clear understanding of the poverty levels and experiences within the catchment area. As such, the first workshop, held in Tullamore, presented stakeholders with an example of Poverty Profiling – “strategically planning the systematic collection, combination and mapping of indicators of social and economic need, drawn from a range of local, regional and national sources on a single local-authority basis.” This technique is used widely in the UK and the Combat Poverty Agency has agreed to fund Offaly as one of the pilot initiatives for this process along with South Dublin and Sligo.

WHY OFFALY?

The population of Offaly is 59,117 (1996). There has been a 1% growth in the population between 1991–1996, against a national average of 2.7%, with a decline in every census since 1951. Situated in the midlands, Offaly is in many ways typical of a small rural county: its capital town, Tullamore, is expanding but with a noticeable decline in rural areas. The county has presently the second lowest disposable income per capita in the country and is likely to suffer further economic downturn with the imminent ESB/Bord na Móna closures.

Offaly County Council fulfils many important roles in the county. Among these is the provision of a broad range of services, including environmental controls, housing, infrastructure-provision, a library service and the arts. These services are crucially important in combating social exclusion. The democratic mandate given to elected representatives on the County Council allows them to play a pivotal role in serving the needs of the community. To date there has not been an explicit strategy in the Council combating social exclusion, although its role as deliverer of some 52 services has played a huge part in the development of the county, both socially and economically.

THE PROJECT’S WORK

Under the terms of its objectives, the work of the CWC/Offaly County Council Project comprises a range of components: a profile of the county is being developed, as are partnerships between agencies, partnerships and NGOs; the Project is looking at ways of influencing policy
development at a wider level, as well as addressing practical issues such as presenting the findings of the project to a wider national audience through an information seminar; producing a final report on the project and feeding into the transnational forum.

The first workshop, in Tullamore, brought together key stakeholders from state agencies, statutory bodies, local authorities and NGOs who identified areas on which the local anti-poverty strategy would focus:

- Accommodation;
- Minority groups;
- Quality of Life;
- Educational disadvantage;
- Welfare dependency;
- Health;
- Transport.

The workshop also began to identify indicators of social exclusion in relation to these areas, such as early school leavers, numbers on unemployment benefit, social housing waiting lists, etc. The poverty-profiling technique was used to complete this process. A subsequent county seminar brought a wider range of stakeholders together and after input from the Oak Partnership, Wider Options, West Offaly Partnership and the Community Forum, the seminar broke into workshops to identify specific strategies and actions. One of the key outcomes of the seminar was the recognition of a need to identify and then mainstream existing models of best practice.

**PROJECT FINDINGS TO DATE**

A number of key points have been identified from the work of the project so far:

- It has been recognised that the problems of social exclusion cannot be addressed by one agency alone and need an integrated, inter-agency response;
- There are three types of actions that can be undertaken under a local anti-poverty strategy. These are area-based, those dealing with communities of interest (e.g. Travellers, youth, people with a disability, women) and the mainstreaming of services;
- It is essential to examine existing services and their intended or unintended effect on poverty and social exclusion;
- For this project, developing a strategy involves examining existing policy under a variety of principles such as equality, inclusion, participation etc. These principles have been discussed and agreed by the project in earlier workshops;
- Establishing a profile of the county has proved to be a mammoth task involving considerable resources. It has been difficult to collate existing data, and a lot of the required information is not available;
- Development of the strategy is not just about addressing financial resources but also about supporting the participation of local communities and the most disadvantaged in the development of the strategy;
- It is important to examine existing institutional arrangements and structures and prioritise the most effective links and inputs for the strategy.

To date the Offaly County Council/CWC Project has completed an audit of local authority services and has identified those with a high, medium and low impact on social exclusion. The first two categories have been developed in more detail. It is planned to develop a number of SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic And Timed – objectives under each service area and to develop an action plan in time for the national allocation of social inclusion units. A national conference to present and promote the outcomes from the project to national and local policy makers, members of local authorities, NGOs, statutory agencies and other key stakeholders is planned as is a report in the form of a strategy statement, outlining models of best practice to be followed by other local authorities.

From the Project’s work, it is possible to draw out a range of key principles needed for the development of a local anti-poverty strategy:

1. Link closely with the County Development Board whose responsibility is to co-ordinate actions in relation to social exclusion in the County;
2. Have a strong input from the Community Forum;
3. Build on existing relationships between agencies;
4. Ensure political leadership at both a national and local level through elected representatives;
5. Develop ‘joint actions’ which ensure additionality;
6. Identify performance measurements/indicators;
7. Plan for a downturn in the economy; ensure the most disadvantaged are not left behind;
8. Do not simply address the symptoms of poverty – develop preventative strategies; prevention is better than cure;
9. Develop strong local social partnerships;
10. Get the commitment of senior staff;
11. Political commitment is essential – from local authority staff, local councillors and nationally;
12. Staff training is essential to develop shared understanding and vision for strategy and services;
13. Establish a local staff committee (social inclusion unit) whose function is to co-ordinate research, develop a vision for the strategy, identify service areas, evaluate existing service areas, implement action and to monitor and review strategy.

*Janice Ransom is European Projects Officer at the Community Workers Co-operative.*
In the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Combat Poverty Agency points to the development of a model for local poverty-profiling (LPP) as a key element of locally-managed anti-poverty strategies. Late in 1999, the Agency commissioned SAHRU (Strategic Area Health Research Unit) to develop and then pilot such a model in two local authorities, Sligo and South County Dublin – chosen for this phase following submissions from several local authorities. The resulting model provides both a conceptual framework and the necessary technical tools to assist local authorities to identify, gather and analyse data on the nature and extent of poverty and social exclusion in their area. Improved monitoring should lead to improved policy-making and planning, with implications for resource allocation through the identification of area-based special needs.

THE PILOT PROJECT

The project undertook a review of related work in Ireland and abroad and then set out to:

- Define a core set of poverty-related indicators. These indicators would be area-based, i.e. they could be specified at the level of a District Electoral Division (DED) – the smallest geographic division for which basic social, demographic and economic data are made available nationally.
- Obtain existing data from the two local authorities directly and from other agencies as well as the Central Statistics Office, to develop the selected indicators;
- Produce local poverty-profile maps (using a Geographic Information System). A map is often a more compelling form of representation than a summary table in a report. Improved visibility results in improved policy response;
- Make recommendations on how to proceed following the pilot phase.

INDICATORS AND DOMAINS

Poverty in Ireland is not absolute but relative, and different socio-economic groups will necessarily experience different forms of poverty. Those believed to be at greatest risk from specific forms of poverty include: lone parents, small farmers, the unemployed – especially the long-term unemployed – early school leavers, Travellers and homeless people, children and the elderly, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, people with disabilities, and asylum-seekers and refugees.

The correlates of poverty include: low income, poor housing, poor education, ill-health and poor access to healthcare, poor access to services and quality of life, and membership of a minority group. From the latter we established six broad groupings (referred to as domains – see table below) within which sets of indicators relating to a common theme have been identified. To allow for appropriately targeted local (i.e. local authority-led) anti-poverty measures, a practical approach is to locate areas in which the chosen indicators show a high level of prevalence. In our experience, many geographical areas or population groups will be prominent across multiple indicators – pointing to long established local area deprivation and inequality of access. The domains include selected sample issues and are fully documented in the report.

SOCIAL HOUSING
- local authority tenants and differential rent support
- rent and mortgage supplements
- housing needs assessment

WELFARE DEPENDENCY
- social welfare figures and long-term unemployment
- number of medical cards
- exemptions from local authority service charges

EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE
- disadvantaged schools
- early school leaving

HEALTH
- chronic illness levels
- differential mortality levels
- low birth-weight infants

QUALITY OF LIFE
- crime levels
- air and water quality
- use of emergency services

MINORITY GROUPS
- Travellers
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- people with disabilities

From these domains, key area-based indicators were defined, analysed and mapped.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identification of actual causes of poverty is improved by analysis at the local level;
- Local analysis must enable a fairer and more sensitive policy response;
- Implementing an LPP model in local authorities has been shown to be both desirable and feasible and has gained the support of senior management.
- The LPP model should now be implemented in the pilot areas. However, provision must be made for training and technical support to facilitate this.
- Additional local authorities wishing to join in should be encouraged to do so on an ad hoc basis.
- The implementation process should be formally reviewed after six months to identify any barriers to the use of the model for wider decision-making within the authority.

POST-PILOT PHASE

At this time the Combat Poverty Agency and SAHRU have agreed to support the implementation of the model in three local authorities (pilot areas plus Co. Offaly) in terms of training and on-going technical support during the initial nine-month period. Provision has also been made to encourage and support the participation of additional local authorities should they wish to join in. Practical guides to LPP are in preparation and will be made available on CD-ROM and in booklet form later this year, and a website will be developed to assist the process.

The authors are all members of SAHRU, Department of Community Health & General Practice, Trinity College Dublin. Alan Kelly may be contacted at the Department for further information.

1 A full report of the pilot project entitled: “The Development of a Model for Local Poverty Profiling”, may be obtained from the Combat Poverty Agency.
LISTENING TO THE LOCAL VOICE
A Case Study

TOM BARRY

It is important to recognise the significant contribution of the many community and voluntary organisations to the growth and development of our state over the years. This sector is recognised at national level and plays an important role in developing social and economic policy as one of the four social partner pillars.

However, it is at a local level that public policies impact most on the community and voluntary sector. Consequently, there is a recognised need for a framework structure which would facilitate the community and voluntary voice in local policy formulation and implementation. This case study, in Tipperary North Riding, illustrates that process.

In Autumn 1999 Directors of Community and Enterprise were recruited by local authorities and were given the task of developing a fair and inclusive method for representing the community and voluntary voice at city/county level. In the case of Tipperary NR, an audit of existing organisations was compiled following public advertisements in the local papers and five information evenings at various centres around the county. Discussions also took place with an existing association which had been formed approximately two years earlier for the purpose of nominating representatives to Strategic Policy Committees. This association had limited participation primarily due to lack of resources. Finally, consultations were held with Tipperary LEADER, Nenagh Community Network, Roscree 2000 and Borrisokane Area Network Development, the latter three groupings being A.D.M.-funded community groups. These discussions concentrated on reaching agreement on the appropriate framework structure to represent the community and voluntary sector.

PRIORITIES

Two clear priorities emerged from these meetings: the need to accommodate integrated community planning and co-operation at local level (parish/town) and the need to bring together communities of interests to participate in and contribute to policy formulation and networking.

Out of these discussions, North Tipperary Community and Development Association was formed with the following objectives:

- to represent the community and voluntary sector in North Tipperary;
- to encourage and facilitate the creation of representative community development councils/associations;
- to foster in particular the inclusion of groups and organisations with a focus on tackling disadvantage and social exclusion;
- to provide administration and development support for the association and to enhance the participation/empowerment of groups from all sectors and areas of the county;
- to act as a nominating body for the community and voluntary sector in North Tipperary;
- to secure resources for the development of new and existing groups in order to meet the needs identified in local communities;
- to provide support for member organisations who are committed to engaging in the process of integrated and co-ordinated community planning at local level;
- to encourage actively the widest possible membership of the association amongst all community and voluntary groups;
- to act as a forum for the sharing of common issues, ideas and interests;
- to contribute to and influence local, national and EU policy with particular regard to areas of community development in its broadest sense.

STRUCTURE OF THE ASSOCIATION

Membership of the Association is subject to a range of criteria: Groups/organisations have to be in existence for at least six months; each group/organisation has to have at least eight members; each group must hold Annual General Meetings and be open to new members; and each group must keep proper financial records.

In turn, Community Development Councils/Associations must hold an Annual General Meeting within twelve months of formation, have at least five affiliated groups/organisations which have been in existence for at least six months and who each have at least eight members; must hold an Annual General Meeting and again, keep proper financial records.

The rules of the Association provide for the election of an Executive committee of 24 members with the following breakdown:

| Community Development Councils | 12 members |
| Communities of Interests * | 12 members |
| **Total** | **24 members** |

*Communities of Interests comprise a range of interest groups: Economic Development – one member; Arts/Culture/Heritage/Irish Language: 4; Youth/Sport: 2; Environmental/Tidy Towns: 2; Social Exclusion/Disadvantage/Disability: 3.

At an Extraordinary General Meeting held on 27 March in Nenagh, the Association’s Executive Committee was elected. Approximately 60 organisations participated. The most important outcome of this process is that a framework structure is now in place which other community and voluntary organisations can join. The Association has been used to nominate community and voluntary representatives to the Community Development Board and Strategic Policy Committees. It is expected that they will also be used by other government/public sector departments or organisations seeking the views of this sector.

Tom Barry is Director of Community and Enterprise, T. ipperary North Riding County Council.
Looked at how local groups can contribute and actively engage in policy developments taking place with regard to child poverty, the seminar board by policy makers. Such work could include issues like the

The first of four regional seminars on the theme of child poverty, supported public awareness, evaluation and research work – particularly work that relates to the Agency’s current strategic priorities. This could help groups to identify policy lessons and develop ways to bring about debate and thinking on new policy proposals and have them taken on board by policy makers. Such work could include issues like the

The importance of integration in service provision for children and at establishing and protecting children’s rights. Several key issues emerged from the conference:

• The importance of early childhood education;
• The growing need for after-school provision for children;
• The importance of integration in service provision for children;
• The need for appropriate community-based programmes for parents and children.

A full report of conference proceedings is available from Catherine Keane, Fine Gael National Headquarters, 51 Upr Mount Street, Dublin 2. Tel: 01 676 1573.

DEADLINES FOR AGENCY GRANTS FOR WORK ON INFLUENCING POLICY

If your group is working to influence public policy either at local, regional or national levels, you may be interested in the Combat Poverty Agency grant scheme, Working Against Poverty. The scheme supports public awareness, evaluation and research work – particularly work that relates to the Agency’s current strategic priorities. This could help groups to identify policy lessons and develop ways to bring about debate and thinking on new policy proposals and have them taken on board by policy makers. Such work could include issues like the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, housing, health, community and local development, educational disadvantage, local government, tax and social welfare, transport, drug use, child care, women’s issues and so on.

The scheme is open to small local groups or larger groups, networks and alliances. Policy work can be short- or long-term and can focus on local, regional or national issues.

The deadline for applications to this scheme is 15 September. For further information, leave your name and address on our dedicated, 24-hour grants phoneline, tel: 01 602 6625. Details of the grant scheme are also on the Agency’s website at www.cpa.ie.

REGIONAL SEMINARS ON INFLUENCING PUBLIC POLICY – A FOCUS ON CHILDREN

The first of four regional seminars on the theme of child poverty, hosted by the Combat Poverty Agency, was held in Kilkenny in May. Providing an opportunity to inform local groups of work and developments taking place with regard to child poverty, the seminar looked at how local groups can contribute and actively engage in policy development, working to ensure that their experience on the ground is reflected in policy at a regional or national level. The dates and venues of the remaining seminars are as follows:

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<tr>
<td>13 September</td>
<td>Sligo</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 October</td>
<td>Limerick</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 November</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
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<td>7-8 November</td>
<td>Monaghan</td>
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<td>18-19 September</td>
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Each seminar will include inputs on the National Children’s Strategy and policy work currently underway at a national level. A speaker from the Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative, will talk about how to effect change in public policy on children and poverty. In addition, four workshops will focus on developing and promoting effective policies on childcare, children’s rights, educational disadvantage and early school leaving and the interests of specific groups of children. These will include presentations from groups working at local and national level and the final session will look at the local contribution to policy development and the next steps to be taken. Booking forms are available from Kate Ennals at the Combat Poverty Agency, tel: 01 602 6620, e-mail: ennalsk@cpa.ie.

POLICY TRAINING FOR COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY TRAINERS

The last of three one-day regional seminars on policy training for trainers in this sector will be held in Limerick on 14 November. Generally, the seminars aim to assist community and voluntary sector trainers and facilitators to incorporate policy work into the work of community groups. More specifically, the aim has been to enhance knowledge of policy making in Ireland; to update trainers on current anti-poverty policy initiatives, and to support participants in integrating their learning into their work. A range of presentations in the morning will provide attendees with policy information, and the afternoon workshops will focus on practical strategies for incorporating learning into work. Booking forms are available from Kate Ennals at the Combat Poverty Agency, tel: 01 602 6620/e-mail: ennalsk@cpa.ie.

MEDIA TRAINING COURSE FOR THE COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR

Two regional courses on media training for community and voluntary organisations will be held in Galway and Monaghan this coming September and November. The aim of the courses is to build the media skills of groups wishing to be involved in public debate on poverty and community development, and training is provided on the basis that groups are open to further work on media-related issues with the Agency.

The first two days of this three-day course involve practical sessions, covering topics such as press-release writing, radio/TV interview training, and information on how the media works, what is newsworthy, deadlines etc. Day three follows a one-month gap, during which time participants are expected to involve themselves in media work, and to bring their experiences to a round-table session. Day three will also look at other media tools such as photo-calls and press conferences, at the role of the CPA in media work and at developing a media plan. The dates are as follows:

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<tr>
<td>18-19 September</td>
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<td>Monaghan</td>
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<td>18 October</td>
<td>Galway</td>
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For further information, including application forms, please contact the Projects Section, tel: 01 6706746.
Building Community Information Networks: Strategies and Experiences; Sheila Pantry; ed; Library Association; London; 1999; 208pp; no price quoted; 1 85604 337 1.

The Information Revolution has altered the way in which communities share information, locally, nationally and internationally, and the rise of the Community Information Network has been rapid. Written by experienced practitioners, this collection of papers defines CINs for the uninitiated, offers advice on how to establish a network and gives an overview of current research and available technology. Essential reading for public information and library managers, this publication is also useful for local authority and educational administrators as well as local community groups wishing to set up their own CINs.

Equality in Education; Kathleen Lynch; Gill & Macmillan Ltd; Dublin; 1999; £21.99; 352pp; 0 7171 2834 2.

A collection of essays by the Co-ordinator of the Equality Studies Centre, University College Dublin, Equality in Education is intended to provide a framework for analysing the role of education in the promotion of equality in Ireland. The book assesses what has been achieved for various social groups in terms of equality in recent years, arguing that current inequalities in the education system are not evolutionary, but mediated by people, and thus can be changed. The author places particular emphasis on the views of young people and children, as well as examining the role of women in Irish education, both as educators and learners. A resource book for students of education, social policy, sociology and women’s studies.


Updated and revised, this ‘How To’ guide provides practical support and guidance to anyone undertaking academic or social research. Focusing on the day-to-day requirements of managing a research project, the guide takes the researcher through the process, from formulation of the idea through developing the proposal and writing up the results. A thorough, step-by-step guide to the research process for students and research professionals and a solid introductory text for research methods courses in the social sciences.

Signposts to Local Democracy: Local Governance, Communitarianism and Community Development; Paul Henderson and Harry Salmon; Community Development Foundation / Warwick Business School; London; 1998; 64pp; no price quoted; 1 901974 04 9.

An examination of the contrasting ideas of Communitarianism and Community Development, this booklet sets both theories against the background of a changing local democracy since the 1997 UK general election. The authors conclude that community development, because of its experience and effectiveness can more effectively engage with the hopes of local communities than the untried Communitarianism, a concept gaining popularity in the United States, which emphasises family values, personal responsibility and ‘good neighbours’, ignoring government’s responsibilities towards citizens and issues of social inequality.


How will the new information technologies structure our society? Who will lose out in the information society? These questions are some of those addressed in this collection of essays on the implications of our rapid evolution into the Information Society. With everyone from politicians to business gurus encouraging us to join the information superhighway or perish, Cyberspace Divide critically examines the complex relationship between technological change and its effect upon social divisions, its consequences for social action and at emerging strategies for social inclusion in the Information Age.

Wherever I Lay My Hat: A Study of Out of Home Drug Users; Gemma Cox and Marie Lawless; Merchant’s Quay Project supported by the Combat Poverty Agency; Dublin; 1999; 82pp; no price quoted; 1 9027940 31 9.

The Merchant’s Quay Project in Dublin was established in 1989 to offer help to the increasing numbers of drug users in that area of Dublin. This study was undertaken in 1999, following increasing concern at the numbers of homeless drug users presenting at the Project. The results of a survey revealed more frequent drug use among homeless service users, greater risk-taking and a greater incidence of physical and mental health problems. The study concludes that drug and homeless service providers need to be made aware of the changing profile of their clientele, and that service provision must be located within the broader context of social exclusion.


Examining the progress made worldwide since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this report describes itself as a rallying cry to the ‘international community to undertake the urgent actions necessary to realize the rights of every child everywhere...’ Focusing on children in countries which face particular challenges – Zambia, Indonesia and Colombia etc – the report looks at the impact of armed conflict, HIV/AIDS, increasing poverty and gender discrimination on the realisation of children’s rights and ends with a pledge to eliminate child poverty in a single generation through a broad-based international alliance.

After School – The Way Forward: Good Practice Guidelines for the Development of a Quality After School Service; Esther Pugh, National Child en’s Nurseries Association; Dublin; 36pp; no price quoted.

A practical set of guidelines for those providing after-school care, After School – The Way Forward recognises the different social and independence needs of children of school-going age, and the varying range of services provided to meet these needs. The guidelines cover topics such as facilitating children’s development through play, standards of premises, links between schools/parents and after-school services, promoting equal opportunities within the service, with the overall aim of promoting good practice across the sector.

Copies of the above titles are available in the Combat Poverty Agency’s Library.

Contact gailvin@cpa.ie or tel: 01 6706746
Involving the Community in National Anti-Poverty Strategies

**YVONNE WHITE**

Both Policy makers and community and voluntary groups have been concerned with finding ways effectively to engage people who are socially excluded, and the organisations which represent them, in social-inclusion and anti-poverty policies. In the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and the Green Paper, Supporting Voluntary Activity, the Combat Poverty Agency commissioned research in 1998 to identify national and international models of consultation and participation which may be appropriate and adaptable in Ireland. Building on this research, a need to explore involvement in a practical way was identified.

With this in mind, the Combat Poverty Agency, the NAPS Unit of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the National Anti-Poverty Networks are currently progressing an EU-funded project whose overall aim is to develop a set of practical guidelines for involving people in the development, implementation and evaluation of anti-poverty and social-inclusion strategies. It is envisaged that these guidelines will benefit all those with an interest in consultation/involve:ment: those affected by anti-poverty policies, those representing their interests, as well as those responsible for policy development.

The guidelines are being developed in conjunction with partners from Northern Ireland, Portugal, Finland and the Netherlands and national seminars are being held in each of the partner countries, involving the statutory and community and voluntary sectors and people who experience poverty and social exclusion. A transnational seminar will be held in Dublin on 16 September 2000, at which learning from all these seminars will be shared and from which guidelines will be developed.

**THE IRISH PICTURE**

In Ireland, the seminars, held on 11 April and 4 May 2000, looked at consultation in terms of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and at practical ways for improving the process. The Irish seminars, which took the form of workshops, allowed people to share their experiences of consultation and to consider what the advantages might be for each of the actors in a consultation exercise: the underlying principles and methods, barriers facing organisations and those who want to consult with them, the supports needed to facilitate effective consultation and the costs of those supports.

**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PARTICIPATION**

Taken together, the Irish seminars identified that participatory approaches place significant demands on all involved, but, according to the workshop findings, have considerable advantages.

For the State, involvement of excluded people in anti-poverty policies helps to:

- improve understanding of issues on the ground and pre-empt problems;
- highlight the inter-dependency of sectors;
- ensure a broader sense of ownership of policy.

For the National Anti-Poverty Networks, consultation helps to:

- increase credibility due to status and access to consultation;
- improve responsiveness and ability to represent people’s needs;
- give a voice to those who do not usually have one.

At a local level, the seminar workshop found that consultation:

- helps to ensure policies are more relevant, promotes trust and responsibility;
- allows for learning for all and changes perceptions;
- is the only way things can really work and can change people’s lives.

**BARRIERS TO CONSULTATION**

However, each sector also identified barriers to the process. From the State’s viewpoint, consultation raises expectations, is time-consuming and cultural barriers can create difficulties. In order to reduce the effect of these barriers, a number of suggestions were made, including the importance of:

- good relationships to build trust;
- being clear about expectations and about the statutory responsibilities of the State;
- training for the State sector.

For the National Anti-Poverty Networks, lack of resources was identified as being the key barrier to consultation – in terms of time, information, administration costs, background supports such as childcare, funds to develop the ability of local organisations to get involved in consultation and training to ensure their representatives speak for the widest group of people.

At the local level, as well as resource issues, other difficulties were identified: the inexperience of local groups in consultation and in being accepted; difficulties in targeting people who should be involved in the process and problems arising as a result of fragmented views within and between groups in the community. Acknowledgement of the different levels of skills and knowledge in the local community – and the use of shadowing and mentoring processes to address these – would be helpful, as would recognition of the different levels in the consultation process and the need for linkages.

**CONCLUSION**

The interest shown in this project by all of the countries involved highlights the importance placed on the development of guidelines based on good practice to ensure the meaningful involvement of excluded people. While the extent of involvement varies from country to country, initial findings indicate that the issues needing to be addressed are very similar. Once the national seminars have been completed, the next stage of the project is the translation of the findings into practical guidelines to which all parties in each of the participating countries can agree.

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