

POLICY SUBMISSION

Submission to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs on Local and Community Development Structures

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1 Introduction and Summary

The Combat Poverty Agency¹ welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs' (DCRGA) consultation process concerning the improvement of structures to bring about better coherence within and between programmes operated by the DCRGA. We understand that the consultation is concerned with maximizing the effectiveness of local delivery structures that fall under the remit of the DCRGA. The full spectrum of these structures is listed in the Minister's input to the Oireachtas Committee (Feb 2003). While Combat Poverty recognizes that the department's remit is broad we focus our comments on the structures most relevant to poverty and inclusion. These include the community development support programme, the local development social inclusion programme, RAPID, the local drugs task forces and county child care committees. Where relevant we also make reference to the Peace Programme. We concentrate our more specific recommendations on areas where we have most practical knowledge and experience: community development and anti-poverty work, local government and social inclusion indicators. However, we hope that our broad principles may have wide relevance.

While recognizing the DCRGA concern is local delivery structures we note that all of these local delivery structures operate in a wider national context. We believe that it is most useful to see the Review in the national policy context of the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS). To do this is to understand the Review not as an administrative exercise but as seeking to

¹ Combat Poverty Agency is a state appointed advisory body that:

- provides advice in an independent, informed and balanced way;
- conducts research into the nature and causes of poverty;
- pilots and evaluates approaches to tackling poverty;
- disseminates information and raises awareness about poverty;
- promotes and supports community development as an important part of strategies to tackle poverty;
- assists in involving people living in poverty to participate in the solutions to addressing poverty; and
- in conjunction with ADM, implements 12 measures in the Peace 2 programme.

enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of current programmes in achieving the NAPS objectives of tackling local concentrations and expressions of poverty in rural and urban areas and with groups at particular risk of poverty and social exclusion.

We believe that the NAPS vision of enhanced community participation in decision-making in order to reach the end goal of elimination of poverty in urban and rural areas and for particular marginalised groups, is a powerful vision. Such a vision sets the review in the context of, and builds on, previous visions in major government strategies including the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Local Government Reform process. We structure our input by developing the relevance of the Review to the evolving relationship between the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and local government reform. We agree that a local authority area-based approach provides a manageable and comprehensible locus for moving forward but suggest that reform towards this end needs to take place in a negotiated way over a longer time period and needs to be matched by further developing capacity, resources and expertise within local government to take on additional responsibilities. We also see this as compatible with the existence of a national-local model with structured co-ordination and integration of county level structures, national programmes and multiple delivery mechanisms at sub county level. We see the Review as an opportunity to embed community development approaches to anti-poverty work more firmly within a local government context.

We propose four NAPS objectives as guiding principles for the DCRGA Review:

- the understanding of poverty as multidimensional;
- the mobilisation of all actors;
- the protection of the most vulnerable; and
- equality of access to public services.

We make practical recommendations regarding:

- community development;
- communities of interest; and
- sub county social indicators to measure impacts of local delivery of public services.

We outline key challenges for managing institutional reform and identify key implementation concerns such as the timetable of reform, processes to inform and involve all stakeholders, the learning process and resourcing capacity building.

In the process of developing this submission we have drawn from our experience as a national agency with experience of anti-poverty work and community development, and we outline our relevance to the ongoing process of reform.

We can contribute our understandings of the links between national/regional/local policies and initiatives to address poverty and social exclusion and the supports needed at each of these levels, as well as the importance of integration (both horizontal and vertical). We can also contribute our experience and analysis of anti-poverty work within community development, local development and local government settings and our knowledge of social inclusion indicators and data strategies.

2 Context setting

Our understanding of the immediate context of the Review is informed by the terms of reference of the Review and the principles underpinning the DCRGA's administrative approach. The Review is concerned with *"strengthening the impact of current resources in terms of on the ground services, supports and benefits for local communities, streamlining structures to avoid overlaps, duplication and undue administrative overheads, bringing transparency, co-ordination and improved control to the funding and operation*

of local community development measures and strengthening the democratic accountability of agencies and service providers in this area".

2.1 The challenge

The DCRGA's political mandate is *to produce a more co-ordinated engagement by the state with communities around the country*. Its sectoral objective concerning regeneration of disadvantaged communities is *to encourage and facilitate communities, with a special focus on areas of disadvantage, and to pursue social and economic progress in their area*. This focus is both welcome and encouraging and places the DCRGA as a central driver of the National Anti Poverty Strategy. Combat Poverty sees the Review as a real opportunity to work towards the mainstreaming of anti-poverty work within a local government context and to ensure that local delivery structures are maximizing their efficiency and effectiveness in tackling poverty at local level. Combat Poverty believes that the NAPS vision of the elimination of poverty (and related targets and indicators) can be made tangible by translating national targets into meaningful local targets and work objectives for local statutory and community organisations. We believe that this correlates with the DCRGA's desire to understand the value of local work by its impact on local communities. We believe that this can be progressed by identifying local social inclusion indicators that can be used to develop strategies to maximise the effectiveness of local delivery structures. Combat Poverty is currently working with the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) and within NDP structures to strengthen social inclusion indicators and related data strategies. We outline in more detail how these might relate to impact assessment in section 3.5 of this submission.

2.2 The sub county infrastructure

The large range of local experiences concerning local structures makes it difficult to conclude whether multiplicity does actually cause overlap. We do not automatically assume that overlap exists in the multiplicity of organisations at sub county level, but we are open to the idea that there may be some overlap in some areas. In general, however, we conclude that what, at first sight, might appear to be duplication of services to the same local population,

is often in practice, a range of discrete services working to a specific geographic location and with discrete communities of interest within the local population. What may appear as overlap looking down from a central viewpoint may look quite different from the perspective of an organization looking up from the local level and seeing only one relevant funding source. Frequently the problem is perceived not as a multiplicity of delivery mechanisms but rather as a complex range of accompanying, often programme specific structures which do not always build on or add value to pre-existing processes and structures at community level. Community organisations may work at a number of levels, through street, estate or parish level community development projects (the unit at this level is best defined by the community's own sense of cohesion and identity); District Electoral Level RAPID Area Implementation Teams; suburban or rural level Local Development Partnerships and Drugs Task Forces; area committee level local government structures; county level childcare committees, County Development Boards and Strategic Policy Committees, to national networks and policy fora. While there may be co-ordination and communication challenges there is not necessarily functional or even geographical overlap. It may well be that at the level of the household most people identify with and work through just one development organisation. While it is imperative that multiple funding sources do not cause confusion and barriers to access, a reduction of the present mix and scale of funding sources could seriously jeopardise individual groups' autonomy and flexibility and reduce their capacity to be effective and independent in their relationship with the local state.

There are clear benefits from local programmes, including their use as key government mechanisms for targeting public resources. In addition, they bring vibrancy into local policy making by involving all actors, they have direct engagement with those affected by poverty and they can respond flexibly to local needs. Community development is a key mechanism for advocacy and building capacity of the most vulnerable to participate in and develop analysis of the range of issues, policies and programmes that affect them. The benefits of community development were highlighted by Craig (1994), who stressed

the substantial contribution that community development makes to local development, the latter requiring strong community infrastructure to maximise effectiveness and relevance. This is also borne out in the implementation of the PEACE 2 Programme. ***Community development should remain a pivotal part of local delivery structures.***

Combat Poverty affirms the Review's efforts to address any multiplicity, overlap, planning and administrative inefficiencies, accountability and value for money issues where they may exist. We do detect a problematic tendency towards programmatic isolation and suspect that it is this which makes added value and synergy harder to materialise. We believe that the use of local level impact targets would both increase the need for meaningful co-ordination and would be likely to produce more synergy. Different groups could see more practical added value from a process of co-operation that is underpinned by shared local goals (see section 3.5), and funders could be satisfied with evidence-based evaluation. Further, we believe that problems of profusion of initiatives, multiplicity of structures with different geographical scales, and weak connections with local government stem from the lack of co-ordination and integration at the national level, both within and between government departments, and the weakness of local government. While these problems are not the fault of the local delivery structure the effects are felt locally. It should thus be possible to refine programmes and to develop future programmes by using existing structures to channel resources. The implementation of the PEACE programme provides a model for this. We believe that it is important not to use the Review and subsequent reform to bolster prematurely what is still a weak system of local government. While this may be a valid long term goal the present local government structures are evolving and still at a learning stage. They do not yet have the capacity to effectively manage these resources and instigate effective delivery to meet the needs on the ground.

2.3 Principles of reform

The terms of reference and principles of the Review imply that community development is understood by the DCRGA as a service or support to a

community. Minister O Cuiv (Oireachtas Committee 19-02-03) described how *the purpose must always be to provide support to the community in the most appropriate way as they work to shape their own futures, address their common goals and achieve their full potential.* Certainly the community development programme does offer supports to volunteer management committees so that they can participate in the planning and development of their local communities. Combat Poverty's understanding of community development is as a process through which a community is empowered to develop its own agenda and analysis and build collective responses. Crucially it is based on the premise that policies, programmes and services intended to tackle or eliminate poverty are much more likely to be efficient and effective if the people who are part of communities affected by poverty are involved in the design and implementation of solutions. This implies that community development is not only a core element within programmes to address poverty that can be located within a local infrastructure, but is also a principle and practice that informs the development of participative and democratic local statutory and community structures. With this understanding at the heart of the vision, any reform of local structures should be informed by an anti-poverty focus with 1) targeted resources and a lead role for poor communities and groups and 2) flexible and innovative local responses to existing and emerging needs from diverse actors in partnerships of equal status.

2.4 The principle of autonomy

The Department's mandate *of co-ordinated engagement by the state with communities* is a complex mandate. Communities often come together to represent their interests and to make demands on the national or local state. There are often tensions between the state and communities about issues relating to planning, to allocation of scarce resources and rights of access to public services. There are sometimes tensions in the reconciliation of competing interests within communities. The inevitable presence of tension between the state and the community is a sign that a democracy is healthy. Thus, this role of critique, through both participative and representative democracy, should be nurtured. This means a challenge to develop structures that nurture participation. One way to do this would be to develop impact

indicators for levels and types of participation. A second challenge is to ensure that mechanisms for ensuring efficient use of public funds do not have the unintended side effect of decreasing the autonomy and independence of local groups. These challenges are all the more urgent in disadvantaged areas where participation rates are low and where there is more reliance on state funding.

Many local groups feel their autonomy has been reduced by the recent requirement for the plans of community and local development organisations to be endorsed at County Development Board level. While this may be helpful for the purposes of informing county level planning, the language of “endorsement” suggests some loss of autonomy relative to local state structures. Actors in both state and community and local development groups are uncomfortable with the broader implications of movement in this direction. If reduced autonomy is not the intention, then the process of trying to achieve an information flow for more effective planning requires more sensitive management and language, and processes of mediation and negotiation that can facilitate resolution of different priorities. Effective co-ordination and integration is built on co-operation, trust and interdependence and implies parity of esteem. It is difficult to envisage how it can thrive within a context of endorsement and control.

3 National Anti-Poverty Strategy

We believe that the DCRGA Review and NAPS can be of real value to each other. The principles and objectives of NAPS can inform the Review and the DCRGA Review can aid the development of structures, processes and practices that further enable the roll out of NAPS objectives especially at local level. The review is relevant to, and can benefit from, the following key objectives of NAPS.

3.1 The understanding of poverty as multidimensional

The understanding that the causes and experiences of poverty are multidimensional is at the heart of the NAPS. This implies that no central or local department has sole responsibility for anti-poverty work and that the range and diversity of local and national organisations working to tackle poverty is a necessity. The real challenge lies in horizontal co-ordination across national departments and more effective vertical integration within departments so that local services can be delivered in a more integrated way to the end user.

Throughout NAPS, the NDP and national partnership agreements there are many examples of institutional attempts to foster greater integration around poverty. National level examples include the NAPS Unit, the Office for Social Inclusion, National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Area Development Management Ltd. Local examples include Local Area Based Partnerships, Local Drugs Task Forces, Integrated Services Projects and RAPID.

All these structures are built on the understanding that one cannot separate the national and local or choose between the national and local: both are necessary. One of the key challenges is to enable the national policy process to be informed by local learning.

3.2 The objective of the mobilisation of all actors especially those in poverty

The involvement of all relevant stakeholders is a fundamental element within both national and local anti-poverty strategies. Community development has the capacity to mobilise those at greatest risk of poverty so that they can directly contribute to efficient and effective design and implementation of solutions. The Review can take on the challenge of embedding participatory processes into the operational features of local government and statutory public services so their delivery meets local need.

Combat Poverty (in collaboration with the NAPS Unit and National Anti-Poverty Networks) has undertaken an EU funded transnational programme (CPA 2000a) researching effective involvement in decision making and has developed guidelines for effective involvement. We have also published a series of handbooks (CPA, 1995) for participation in local development partnerships. Combat Poverty has recently commenced a programme *Building Healthy Communities* that seeks to support community development responses to health service delivery at local level and within communities of interest. Our experience to date suggests that promoting participative styles requires resources and capacity building, for both public service staff and community groups.

3.3 Protection of the most vulnerable

The protection of the most vulnerable requires specific supports and processes to enable their voice to be heard in decision making structures. This can be facilitated through the retention in any new structures of the concept and principle of communities of interest. This means an understanding of community development based on the premise that for many, disadvantage is not necessarily related to living in a poor neighbourhood but to other factors such as discrimination, inequality or rural isolation. While many communities of interest organise locally to express local concerns, most also organise nationally and seek to participate directly in national decision making processes. Even if representative democracy had very high levels of participation, its geographic electoral divisions mean it is unable to directly filter the voice of communities of interest into decision making. National level community development, with links to local work, is a

crucial part of the infrastructure of communities of interest. The Review process needs to ring fence budgets, processes and decision making spaces in order to facilitate the continued involvement of communities of interest.

3.4. Equality of access to public services

Better and more effective local delivery structures is at the heart of the Review. People's quality of life is a combination of participation and material well-being. For many, well-being is determined by access to resources and public services (health, income support, education, welfare, personal social services, recreation and social and family networks). Since the Barrington Report (1991) the issue of reforms to better optimise sub county level local service delivery has been on the agenda. The Sabel report (1996) affirmed the need to approach the delivery of local public services, local government and local development in an integrated way. The local development partnerships, the pilot Integrated Services Projects, One Stop Shop projects, RAPID and Drugs Task Forces have sought to make better sense of local resources for local communities and all involved participation and involvement of local communities. In 2.1 and 2.3 we suggested that one way to make sense of the challenges of co-ordination and impact measuring was to develop local indicators that make sense to all stakeholders, statutory services, local government planners, and local communities. We expand on this in the next section.

3.5 Social Indicators

There are huge challenges in building participative national and local models of public service delivery and in developing geographic social indicators that enable all inputs to be measured in relation to impacts locally. However, it is possible to build on ongoing work in developing social inclusion indicators and data gathering strategies. In order to progress this work the Review needs to address the development of common standardised data collection and analysis mechanisms, and identify a process within County Development Board structures for agreeing area level targets. Ideally, these should be related to NAPS national targets and indicators. The end result would be

common standardised data collection, where all state agencies would work to geographically localised plans that are poverty and equality proofed. The technical tools need to be further developed but can draw from ADM, OSI, CDSP and local authority data bases.

4 Key challenges of managing institutional reform

Minister O'Cuiv (Oireachtas Committee 19-02-03) confirmed that having outlined the vision and strategic direction in Summer 2003, he envisages a reform process of approximately three years. It will be difficult, even after the vision and strategy is articulated, to imagine what the future will look like in terms of structures and processes. There are always challenges in managing institutional reform. While some challenges are well known to all reform processes they acquire particular significance in disadvantaged communities.

4.1 Restoration of multi- annual funding

It is our experience to date that the Review is causing a high level of fear and anxiety in local and community development projects. The general level of uncertainty has been compounded by programme cutbacks, the restriction of funding to annual or quarterly funding and the general atmosphere of fiscal austerity. The consequent concerns for work commitments, jobs and personal futures, and ultimately the negative impact on disadvantaged communities, is understandable. We are aware that both Minister O Cuiv and Minister of State Noel Ahern have, over the course of the Review, made constructive and reassuring statements about the future of community development. However, the early restoration of multi-annual funding would reassure the CDSP that rationalisation does mean less bureaucracy not less community development and less resources. The principle of multi-annual funding and it's importance in effective programme planning and delivery was strongly endorsed in the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity*.

4.2 Ongoing negotiation of reform process

The fear and uncertainty also relates to the lack of information concerning the process, concerns about good faith in the equality of engagement of all stakeholders and concerns about the ability of community organisations to have a meaningful influence on the future of community development. People's concerns about meaningful engagement can be met by recognising that any reform process is an ongoing one that requires an ongoing

negotiation between key stakeholders. While the immediate Review may decide on the vision that will drive future reform, the detail of that reform should be negotiated over a longer time period. This requires an early indication of the scale and time-scale of reform and of the process through which people can have meaningful engagement in the reform. Both NESF (Report No 16) and the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity*, as well as Combat Poverty's guidelines on effective involvement outline principles and processes of participation and consultation between the state and the community sector. These can inform the ongoing process of reform and act as guidelines for any new institutional configurations arising from the Review.

4.3 Learning and capacity building

Fears about reform are not just about loss of jobs but about loss of an understanding of community development and institutional learning that has been built over decades. The reform implementation process needs to harness the huge body of expertise in local and community development projects and to retain and share the skills and human capital in the programmes. Reforms should be careful to build on, and retain, key knowledge and skills in the existing infrastructure, including national, regional and specialist supports for community and local development, as well as retaining existing levels of resources. The emerging local government structures are still in a learning phase and there are clear teething difficulties in the SIMS in many counties. No matter how welcome the vision of local government playing a key role in progressing social inclusion, the institutional capacity of local government to absorb more responsibility for social inclusion is weak in the short term and the development of appropriate mechanisms, expertise and resources to do this will need to be carefully developed and nurtured over time. Social inclusion related learning and training needs are widely understood among those engaged in anti-poverty work and those responsible for supporting community and local development. They are also extensively reviewed in the reviews of NAPS (CPA, NESF) and of poverty proofing (NESC), and also in the work of the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* (DSCFA). This work can inform the Review.

4.4 Central support structures for anti-poverty focused community development

Training, information and capacity building are needed for all stakeholders including local government staff and departments or statutory agencies delivering public services locally and nationally. There is a clear potential role for a central support mechanism that can offer support to all stakeholders working within the broad remit of anti-poverty focused community development. While support will be delivered at a local level it is important to locate local, specialist and regional delivery and support mechanisms within a broader central support network. In our view, given the diversity of the stakeholders and the variety of government departments and initiatives likely to draw on support, an autonomous support structure with dedicated resources and expertise may work best. Our submission to the Green Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* (Combat Poverty Agency; 1999) stressed that a central co-ordination of support would entail promoting, encouraging and monitoring quality of supports and ensuring the development and resourcing of a coherent infrastructure of supports and opportunities for participation.

5 Relevance of the Combat Poverty Agency

In the process of developing this submission we have drawn from our experience as a national agency working to support anti-poverty work through community development, area based approaches, national anti-poverty networks, the local government learning network, the PEACE Programme, the National Development Plan and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. Here we highlight Combat Poverty's relevance to the ongoing process of reform. Our central analysis is built on a national and local anti-poverty model. The focus on national policy recognises that the causes of poverty are structural and multidimensional and that poverty proofing of national policy is required. However, this has to be complemented with local level policies and area-based strategies that can effect local delivery of public services and can address concentrations of poverty at local level and within communities of interest.

5.1 NAPS, NDP and PEACE Programme: social indicators and data strategies

One of the core features of NAPS is the institutional link between national anti-poverty policy and its local implementation. We have already stressed that to be meaningful targets and indicators have to be operationalised at local sub county level. Combat Poverty and the Office for Social Inclusion have recently worked together in the development of social inclusion indicators and data strategies, through NAPS, the local government learning network and work on the NDP. This work can contribute to the development of coherent local impact measurement tools.

5.2 Supporting participation in the policy process

Combat Poverty has traditionally supported the Community Development Programme and has for many years been involved in the advisory and support infrastructure of the programme. We continue to support participation in policy making processes through practice to policy initiatives, through the National Anti-Poverty Networks Programme (which funds and supports

national networks of local groups to participate in policy making fora) and through support for the 'disadvantaged' strand within the NESF. We also provide grants, training, resource materials and seminars for anti-poverty groups. Through European partnership we have developed guidelines for effective involvement. We also undertake this work through the PEACE 2 Programme.

5.3 Local government learning network

The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network was established in 2000 by Combat Poverty in collaboration with the Department of Environment and Local Government and the NAPS Unit (now OSI) in DSCFA (now DSFA). Under this programme a substantial range of learning has taken place and support tools developed. This has included case studies of good practice, "how to" guide books, regional training, networking fora, publications and a quarterly network newsletter. Many of these are currently used by local authority staff. The work includes supports for local authorities in understanding and supporting community development and in involving communities in local government.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, we welcome the DCRGA's mandate to focus on the regeneration of the most disadvantaged areas and the stress on the role of communities in effective local delivery structures that can tackle local concentrations and expressions of poverty in rural and urban areas. We have suggested that the Review be driven by a vision of community participation in local decision-making, where communities affected by poverty are involved in the design and implementation of solutions. We believe this vision is compatible and coherent with local government reform, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity*.

We have outlined a number of principles that can inform the review. From community development we forward principles of justice, equality, autonomy, active participation and partnership. From NAPS we have outlined objectives concerning the mobilisation of all actors, the protection of the most vulnerable, the importance of access to public services and the understanding of poverty as multidimensional. Supporting the participatory process and resourcing capacity building can be informed by guidelines and principles in the White Paper, *Supporting Voluntary Activity*. We have outlined our relevance to the ongoing process of reform and suggested that we can contribute our national-local model and our support, experience and expertise.

Ultimately we are suggesting a ***model as to how we see local structures working***. In the model we differentiate three levels. ***Level one is the community development grass root initiatives*** which we believe should remain as they are and continue to be funded from a central government source. They are the essential building block for other local initiatives. ***Level two is the area based local projects*** which should horizontally involve all potential stakeholders. RAPID and LDSIP should be combined and used as a local focus for integrated planning in poor areas, with funding channelled through ADM. ***Level three is the county level structures***, which have the function of overview and identification of gaps at county level, and provide a

specific link with local government. They could present an annual report which could be used to monitor impacts at local level. All should be part of a broader social inclusion framework at county level, to be agreed between relevant actors and co-ordinated at local government level. The model assumes that one cannot separate the national and local or choose between the national and local. Both are necessary and interdependent.

The more ***discrete recommendations that follow are consistent with this model.***

- i. We recommend that the reform model be informed by an antipoverty focus and targeted resources with a lead role for poor communities, and flexible and innovative local responses from diverse actors in partnerships of equal status.
- ii. We recommend the use of local level impact targets. They would provide a focus for meaningful co-ordination and synergy among local groups. Groups would see added value from a process of co-operation that is underpinned by shared local goals, and funders could be satisfied with evidence-based evaluation. Local social inclusion indicators would require common standardised data collection. Ideally all state agencies would work to geographically localised plans that are poverty and equality proofed. The technical tools require further development but can draw from ADM, OSI, CDSP and local authority databases.
- iii. We recommend that there is no move to reduce the range of funding sources available to disadvantaged communities and groups, as this would seriously jeopardise individual groups' autonomy and flexibility and reduce their capacity to be effective and independent in their relationship with the local state.

- iv. We recommend that present programmes can be refined, and future programmes developed, by using and building on existing structures to channel resources. The PEACE 2 Programme provides such a model.
- v. We recommend that structures nurture participation and have impact indicators for levels and types of participation. We recommend that the promotion of participative models is backed by resources and capacity-building for both public service staff and community groups.
- vi. We recommend that the process of incorporating the plans of community and local development organisations into County/City Development Plans and processes requires more sensitive management and language, and processes of mediation and negotiation that can facilitate resolution of different priorities.
- vii. We recommend that the Review process ringfences budgets, processes and decision making spaces in order to facilitate the continued involvement of communities of interest.
- viii. We recommend the early restoration of multi-annual funding to reassure the CDSP that rationalisation does mean less bureaucracy, not less community development or reduced resources. We also recommend that the level of funding and resources for social inclusion work is maintained and incrementally increased.
- ix. We recommend an early indication of the scale and time-scale of reform and of the process through which people can have meaningful engagement in the reform. Both NESF (Report No 16) and the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* as well as the Combat Poverty Agency Guidelines on Effective Involvement outline principles and processes of participation and consultation between the state and the community sector. These can inform the ongoing process of reform and act as guidelines for any new institutional configurations arising from the Review.

- x. We recommend continued and enhanced attention to building the capacity of local government to play a fuller role in progressing social inclusion. This means implementing recommendations in NAPS (CPA, NESF) and review of poverty proofing (NESC) and also in the work of the White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* (DSCFA).
- xi. We recommend a central co-ordination of support aimed at promoting, encouraging and monitoring quality of supports, ensuring the development and resourcing of a coherent infrastructure of supports and opportunities for participation.
- xii. We recommend that DCRGA draw from the support and resources offered under the statutory functions of the Combat Poverty Agency, especially in the areas of supporting community development and anti-poverty work, supporting participation and involvement in decision-making, the local government learning network, the PEACE 2 Programme and the ongoing work with the Office for Social Inclusion on social inclusion indicators and data strategies.

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