

Policy Submission

Community Development Programme 2007-2013

**Submission to the Department of
Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs**

September 2007

Submission to

The Minister of State and the Department of
Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
on Community Development and Disadvantage
and on the
Community Development Programme
2007-2013

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Executive summary

Community development in Ireland has expanded significantly over the last twenty years. Irish community development in the 21st century has its roots in the poverty, emigration and high unemployment of the 1970s/80s. In the course of this period, community development was predominantly a voluntary activity.

Today, despite economic success, poverty still exists, but it is less visible and harder to tackle. Jobs and income supports have significantly reduced the level of poverty in Ireland over the past 15 years. However, the most recent statistics (2005) show that 7% of the population still lives in consistent poverty and 18.5% is at risk of poverty. Today, the causes of poverty are more complex. Many people living in poverty experience multiple problems (e.g. educational disadvantage, unemployment, addiction, both physical and mental health problems, disabilities, homelessness, lack of access to transport, rural poverty). Therefore, solutions focusing on a single issue may have little impact. A multi-dimensional response to poverty is needed.

Today, State-supported or State-sponsored community development activity focused on poverty and disadvantage is embedded in a range of national policy initiatives. Community development is used as an anti-poverty strategy to support groups experiencing poverty in Ireland

This submission overviews a number of issues regarding community development as an anti-poverty strategy. It also considers a number of issues specific to the Community Development Programme in the context of it being rolled out over the next seven years under the National Development Plan.

Five key messages

The key messages from the submission are five-fold:

(i) Combat Poverty has statutory obligations, a long commitment and expertise in supporting and promoting community development as an anti-poverty strategy.

(ii) While there are many definitions of community development, Combat Poverty understands it to be a process that activates, encourages and supports groups of people to join together in activities that promote their common interest to improve their communities. Community development reflects a commitment to building a more just and equal society.

In the context of addressing poverty, community development is understood as a developmental activity that works for change in disadvantaged areas or with disadvantaged groups (e.g. Travellers, people with disabilities, lone parents, new communities). This change seeks to address the causes and symptoms of poverty through people building their capacity to organise together to give voice to their needs and experiences, to make collective decisions on behalf of their communities and to participate in decision making that affects them.

(iii) Even though there is increasing articulation and ‘official’ recognition by public policy of community development, there is a need for an overall strategic framework. It should also consider and embrace the potential for all-island co-operation on community development.

Such a framework could:

- clarify the nature of the State’s understanding of community development and its role as an instrument of public policy;
- consider strategies to manage the relationships, tensions in and constraints of State-funded community development activity including the

maintenance of the autonomy of community development groups and activities;

- consider strategies for the development of national standards for community engagement;
- consider strategies for supporting the development of a stronger evidence base on the impact and outcomes of community development;
- consider strategies for supporting the professional development of community development workers including building the skills and knowledge of community development workers (paid and unpaid);
- consider medium to long term strategies for funding community development;
- consider strategies for recognising and strengthening community development as a professional competency, expected of personnel in government departments and other public service organizations, who work in community development policy contexts or with disadvantaged groups and communities
- consider strategies for support all-island co-operation on community development approaches to tackle poverty and promote social inclusion.

(iv) Specifically, in relation to the Community Development Programme for 2007-2013, the design of a centrally-administered National Programme, in the context of local community development activity, is a key challenge. The principles of community development must inform the design, structures and processes of the Programme. A National Community Development Programme needs to

- allow for the identification of local needs;
- support the voicing of local concerns;
- facilitate flexibility, autonomy and local control of community groups;
- enable people to 'do things' at a local level to improve their communities.

The following characteristics are suggested as key elements to capture the 'National Programme' dimension of the next CDP:

- A national decision-making structure to oversee the direction and development of the CDP
- Shared concepts and principles of community development
- Shared understanding of poverty and disadvantage
- Shared vision, aim and objectives of a national programme
- Shared governance standards for funded projects
- Shared features of management models of funded projects
- Shared features of funded activities and initiatives
- Shared elements of community development practice
- Shared agreement on how to enter and exit the CDP
- Transparent mechanisms for application, decision-making and review of funding proposals
- Shared monitoring and evaluation processes
- Structures for intra-Programme networking
- Structures for generating, reflecting on and promoting Programme-level learning and issues to relevant audiences including the public policy structures and personnel
- Structures for supporting the professional development of paid and unpaid community workers, volunteers and management committee members e.g. education and training
- National profiling of activities and benefits of the Programme
- Other relevant support structures.

(v) The next CDP must be underpinned by operational principles to guide all actions and activities of the CDP. These operational principles must reflect core community development principles. These principles should incorporate:

Empowerment – working with people to enable them to take more control of decisions that affect them and their communities

Working collectively – supporting people to come together to identify the things that they want to change in their community and to work together with others to achieve that change

Participation – people have the right to participate in decisions and structures that affect their lives

Social justice and equality – community development is concerned to achieve social change that enables individuals, groups and communities to realise their full potential, uninhibited by unfair or discriminatory social structures and systems.

Combat Poverty is very pleased to have the opportunity to advise on the formation of public policy on community development. The remainder of the submission provides a more detailed discussion of key issues. A number of recommendations are also proposed.

Combat Poverty

September 2007

1. Introduction

This submission is made in response to an open invitation from the Minister of State at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DRCRAG) to advise on how the community development approach meets the needs of disadvantaged communities. It is also in response to a consultation by the DCRAG on how to develop and improve the Community Development Programme for the duration of the current National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013¹.

The submission is presented in three sections.

- Section 1 introduces Combat Poverty's interest and support for community development as an anti-poverty strategy.
- Section 2 overviews a range of general issues regarding community development in Ireland and makes recommendations to strengthen it.
- Section 3 focuses on the Community Development Programme, sponsored by the DCRAG and makes recommendations for its enhancement over the next seven years of the NDP.

1.1 Combat Poverty

The Combat Poverty Agency is a State advisory agency that develops and promotes evidence-based proposals and measures to combat poverty in Ireland. Combat Poverty works for a poverty-free Ireland by striving for change which will promote a fairer and more just, equitable and inclusive society.

Combat Poverty has a statutory mandate in the area of community development. This is a unique mandate not shared by any other statutory body. Combat Poverty has the following statutory functions in relation to community development '*as a means of overcoming poverty*'².

¹ Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2 August 2007 www.pobail.ie

² Combat Poverty Agency Act, 1986

- the collection and dissemination of information on poverty and community development and acting as a centre for counselling and training in relation to, and for assisting, encouraging and the giving of information on, community development as a means of overcoming poverty;
- in consultation with the Minister, fostering and assisting (whether by means of the provision of financial or material aid or otherwise) projects of community development and activities to overcome poverty³.

Combat Poverty welcomes the opportunity to make a contribution to the formation of public policy on community development.

1.2 Combat Poverty and community development

Combat Poverty's role in relation to community development as an anti-poverty strategy, over time, has incorporated several approaches. These have included pilot programmes, research, evaluation, policy advice, funding, demonstration programmes promoting community development approaches, technical support to national programmes, the production of learning materials and education and training.

Combat Poverty's current Strategic Plan 2005-2007 contains a number of commitments that reflect its institutional support for community development. These include, amongst our organisational principles, recognition that the involvement and empowerment of individuals and communities affected by poverty is necessary to tackle poverty effectively.

One of Combat Poverty's current strategic objectives supports local and regional responses to poverty, including border areas affected by the Northern Ireland conflict. For a number of years, Combat Poverty has worked in the border counties with Pobal Ltd. and other agencies to administer the *EU Peace and Reconciliation Programmes* (Peace 1, 2, 3) and aspects of the *Interreg* Programme. These have incorporated support for community development to

³ op. cit Section 4.2.c and Section 4.2.3

build social inclusion and social cohesion in a post-conflict situation. On behalf of Border Action, the intermediary body that has administered these Programmes, Combat Poverty has made a separate submission on Community Development and Peace Building. This reflects learning from the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programmes.

As part of its *Local Government Programme*, Combat Poverty provided workshops on community development and consultation and participation techniques for staff in local authorities. It supports community based groups to build their capacity to develop and work with local authorities in generating local anti-poverty strategies.

For the past six years, Combat Poverty has led the development of the *Building Healthy Communities Programme* to support disadvantaged communities to improve health outcomes, using community development principles and practice. For example, this has supported new ethnic minority communities in Ireland to identify their health needs and has supported women experiencing schizophrenia to voice their experiences to policy formation processes on mental health.

Currently, Combat Poverty's *Having Your Say Programme* works to strengthen the policy voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty. For example, this has supported a local project to work on policy issues arising from their day-to-day contact with people not eligible for social welfare payments.

From this work, Combat Poverty has published a range of titles that promote community development approaches to tackling poverty and reflect on current issues and challenges⁴.

⁴ The range of recently Combat Poverty titles published on community development include: *Community Development and Public Policy*; *Community Development and Health*; *The Role of Community Development in Tackling Poverty in Ireland: A literature review*; *Community Development: Current issues and challenges*; *Assessing Student Learning Opportunities in Community Development in Ireland*; *Community Development in Further Education in Ireland*; *Directory of Student Learning Opportunities in Community Development in Ireland 2006*; *Online*

On behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Combat Poverty is also undertaking an independent review of the SPEAK reporting system within the Community Development Programme. The review's purpose is to make SPEAK more effective and user-friendly and to identify a range of supports and training necessary to make the system sustainable into the future.

Directory of Student Learning Opportunities in Community Development Courses at Third Level 2007; Communities, Voices and Change: A Report on the policy work of CDPs, FRCs and Partnership; Community Participation and Primary Care: Learning from the Building Healthy Communities Programme; A Guide to Community Participation in the Health Services (forthcoming).

2. Community development and addressing the needs of disadvantaged communities

This section of the submission responds to the request by the Minister of State at the Department of Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs to address how community development addresses the needs of disadvantaged communities. It goes on to make a number of suggestions for strengthening Irish community development as an anti-poverty strategy.

2.1 Defining community development

The most recent statistics (2005) show that 7% of the population still lives in consistent poverty and 18.5% is at risk of poverty. Although employment has proved extremely effective in significantly reducing poverty levels, today, the causes of poverty are more complex. Many people living in poverty experience multiple problems (e.g. educational disadvantage, unemployment, addiction, both physical and mental health problems, disabilities, homelessness, lack of access to transport, rural poverty). The chances of experiencing sustained poverty in adulthood are related to the socio-economic environment a person was brought up in, especially in relation to child poverty where parents lack the financial ability to invest in their children's education⁵. These financial constraints also affect parenting abilities, the home environment and role models. Studies have also shown that a lack of childhood educational opportunities can result in adult poverty, perpetuating the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

Poverty can make it difficult for people to act and work for change in their lives or in the lives of their communities. The day to day business of making 'ends meet' often absorbs all available energy.

- People in poverty lack financial resources.

⁵ EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) *Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty*, CSO, Dublin 2005

- They may have insufficient access to the skills and capacities common to policy planning and public decision-making processes
- They may have insufficient knowledge of and unequal access to the networks and systems that inform and influence public decision-making
- They may have insufficient and unequal access to the decision-making process itself at administrative, executive and parliamentary levels and at local, regional, national and international levels.

Individually, people in disadvantaged areas or in disadvantaged groups may feel alienated from mainstream society and powerless to improve the quality of their lives or environment. This is where community development (sometimes called 'bottom-up development') comes in. People come together to improve things.

While there are many definitions of community development, Combat Poverty understands it to be a process that activates, encourages and supports groups of people experiencing poverty to join together in activities that promote their common interest, improve their communities. Community development reflects a commitment to building a more just and equal society.

In the context of addressing poverty, community development is understood as a developmental activity that works for change in disadvantaged areas or with disadvantaged groups (e.g. Travellers, people with disabilities, lone parents, new communities). This change seeks to address the causes and symptoms of poverty through people building their capacity to organise together to give voice to their needs and experiences, to make collective decisions on behalf of their communities and to participate in decision making that affects them.

2.1.1 Community development principles

The above understanding of community development, in an anti-poverty context, is underpinned by key principles. These are:

Empowerment – working with people to enable them to take more control of decisions that affect them and their communities

Working collectively – supporting people to come together to identify the things that they want to change in their community and to work together with others to achieve that change

Participation – people have the right to participate in decisions and structures that affect their lives

Social justice and equality – community development is concerned to achieve social change that enables individuals, groups and communities to realise their full potential, uninhibited by unfair or discriminatory social structures and systems.

In other words, involving and empowering individuals and communities affected by poverty is necessary to tackle poverty effectively. Policies, programmes and services intended to reduce poverty or disadvantage are more likely to be efficient and effective if those with direct experience of the problems or those who live in communities affected by these problems, are involved in the design and implementation of solutions. In this way, community development can help people to create and influence solutions to gaps in services or facilities or to create and influence initiatives that can improve their living circumstances.

A further contribution of applying the principles of community development is the strengthening of democratic life and social inclusion by:

- promoting the real experience and voice of disadvantaged, isolated or vulnerable communities;
- empowering disadvantaged, isolated or vulnerable to dialogue with and participate in decision-making with public authorities and other institutions and groups in society;

- promoting active citizenship amongst excluded groups in disadvantaged areas and giving people a 'stake' in their community;
- working to change the economic and social conditions that affect disadvantaged communities or disadvantaged groups.

2.1.2 Community development in action

Typically, community development is understood to be concerned with task and process. A community development approach involves the achievement of the task through people's capacity to act collectively and in a way where they participate in and have control over decision-making. The process of community development – of doing things together - includes the extent of change in people's confidence, isolation, self-esteem, knowledge and the extent to which people participate in and have control over decision-making that affects them. The task may be about the extent to which material conditions have improved in local communities or for particular groups. For example, this can be either through improved availability or accessibility of public services and facilities or through self-help leading to community provision of services and facilities. The participation of locally based community organisations with a commitment to community development principles and approaches were instrumental in shaping the processes and outcomes of regeneration initiatives in Dublin including in Fatima Mansions, Inchicore, Ballymun and O'Devaney Gardens.

Because community development is often concerned with addressing the causes of poverty and disadvantage and tackling the source of these issues, it can also be cost effective and lead to more efficient use of public resources. For example, tenant involvement in the management of public housing can create a greater sense of community responsibility and reduce vandalism. Many estate management initiatives in areas of local authority housing provision are based on community participation.

Community development activity also contributes to challenging negative stereotypes about disadvantaged communities or groups. It contributes to building a sense of community identity and pride.

Community development takes place in:

- a range of settings e.g. inner urban cities, suburbs of cities, small towns, villages, rural areas;
- different types of communities e.g. geographical communities such as parishes or housing estates, communities of interest such as lone parents, Travellers, older people, new communities
- different policy contexts e.g. national, regional or local contexts such as anti-poverty, regeneration, anti-drugs, area based partnerships⁶.

2.2 Community development in Irish public policy

Irish social policy and social inclusion commitments support and promote community development in a range of policy instruments such as *Transforming Ireland National Development Plan 2007-2013*, the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016 Ten Year Framework for Social Partnership*, the *National Primary Care Strategy*, the *Local Government Reform Process* and the *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2007-2016*. These commitments are reflected in several national programmes and initiatives that incorporate community development.

Amongst many others, these include:

- the Community Development Programme;
- the Family and Community Services' Resource Centres Programme;
- the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme;
- the RAPID Programme;
- EU Peace and Reconciliation Programmes (Peace 1/2/3 Programmes);

⁶ Taylor Peter, Alan Barr, Stuart Hashagen. 2000. *Achieving Better Community Development*. London: Community Development Foundation

- County Development Boards and related structures;
- Primary Care Teams;
- Drugs Task Forces;
- Local regeneration strategies.

This indicative list suggests that there is a growing tendency for key policy commitments to recognise that the active engagement of local communities is required for the implementation of a range of policies, programmes and services.

This is further strengthened by the call to give:

greater recognition to community and voluntary groups who pioneer ways of addressing the marginalised positions of individuals, families and communities—creating the right framework for their continuing emergence while engaging them in networks and processes which raise their standards, increase their effectiveness and ensure transparency and accountability in return for medium to long-term security in funding⁷.

Community development is sponsored, funded and/or promoted by community and voluntary groups and by statutory bodies. Over the last 20 years, much of the expansion of community development has involved a range of actors. This includes generic community development undertaken by the community and voluntary sector as people organise to address particular issues and community need. It also includes Programmes or initiatives, developed to roll out Government policy objectives, and employing or reflecting community development approaches. Examples of this include the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, the RAPID Programme, dimensions of the local government reform process and the roll out of Primary Care Teams within health policy. Government and statutory bodies are both promoters and funders of community development activities. Other bodies have also played roles in the expansion of community development. These have included funding roles and/or initiation of particular initiatives by private companies and philanthropy bodies. .

⁷ NESC. 2005. *The Developmental Welfare State*. Dublin: NESC

People are involved in unpaid community development work as volunteers, community leaders or members of groups working in particular contexts or pursuing collective activities on behalf of their communities.

People are also involved in paid community development worker roles, employed by local groups in particular community settings. Statutory bodies also employ community development posts or posts with community development related responsibilities.

2.2.1 State understanding of community development

The extent to which State-supported expansion of community development is concerned with empowering and giving voice to people who experience poverty, disadvantage and inequality is a contested issue. For example, a recent communication (February 2007) from DCRGA to all Community Development projects outlined that the: [CDP]

is funded to deliver Government policies and provide services in the public interest and it is essential that this is done in an equitable, transparent and non-partisan way.

This statement has been interpreted by some directly involved in community development as evidence that the State's understanding of the CDP constitutes a mechanism for service provision. This is seen as undermining the community development principles which are meant to underpin the Programme⁸.

There are a number of dimensions to this:

- the extent to which the direct provision of services, some of which may otherwise be traditional public services, deflects from core community

⁸ Bassett M. 2007. *Background paper to inform Combat Poverty submission to DCRA on the development of the CDP* (unpublished)

development activities to support local communities to identify and articulate local needs and to collectively work for change to address these;

- the extent to which dependency on State funding undermines the autonomy of local community action and voice for change;
- the extent to which the State 'uses' local community groups as a low cost public expenditure mechanism for the delivery of its responsibilities for welfare provision.

Community development can positively shape policy formation and service delivery. Because community development processes explore marginalized experiences and can lead to the discovery and identification of new needs, it can also identify the fault lines in existing policies – that is, areas where current policy needs to change or where new policy need to be created. For example, current Government policy on drug use arose out of the experiences of local communities that policy, as previously annunciated and practiced, needed to change. Community development organizations presented these community experiences and helped change the policy paradigm which in turn shaped the service provision to address problematic drug-use. If the funding arrangements of these community organizations had prevented the advocacy of alternatives to existing government policy on drugs these community experiences might have been silenced and their value lost to policy process of addressing drug use.

Many service providers share community development practitioners' commitment to empowerment and participation principles. Local services improve the quality of people's lives. The delivery of community based services, potentially, can provide opportunities for their design and delivery to be shaped by the needs and experiences of local communities and local people. It can also provide evidence for communities to feedback into service planning their experience of the impact

of such services on their daily lives. These roles can contribute to shaping and creating new models of service delivery.

Community-based services can also facilitate individuals to access mainstream services in a more amenable local setting and can be a means for local groups to engage with the local community.

The requirement for community development groups to provide services, does risk the possibility of limiting the potential for local interpretation or autonomy, as they are often bound by national priorities and targets. Yet, at the same time, the provision of services is a response to the 'task' aspect of community development which is concerned to improve people's living conditions. For the community development approach to be evident, the process is equally important and not subordinate to the task. The empowerment and participation of people in identifying the need for services and in shaping, designing and managing these is crucial.

Potentially, the community development approaches to service delivery can provide for greater community ownership in the design, implementation and management of different services and for influencing the allocation of resources to disadvantaged groups as areas.

It is important that statutory bodies that fund community development, recognise and value the independence of community voices, and the empowerment of local people to collectively organize to change the way current systems and approaches may reproduce poverty and disadvantage. It is also important that these bodies negotiate the relationship between them and community development groups and be willing to engage with community groups on issues of change resulting from community development processes. The understanding of community development as contributing to democratic life reflects an

understanding that a healthy democracy is one that accommodates analyses, experiences and proposals that may be contrary to the status quo. The Government's commitment to reduce poverty and recent commitments on active citizenship, as outlined in the Task Force on Active Citizenship, are key policy contexts for this.

2.2.2 Strategic framework for State promotion of community development

At national level, State-supported expansion of community development cuts across several government departments (including Community, Rural, and Gaeltacht Affairs; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Social and Family Affairs; Health and Children). The role of the Department of An Taoiseach in regard to implementing the Report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship is also relevant.

Given the increasing articulation and 'official' recognition by public policy of community development, it might be said that an overall strategic framework for community development is somewhat underdeveloped, in a national public policy context. Such a framework could:

- clarify the nature of the State's understanding of community development and its role as an instrument of public policy;
- consider strategies to manage the relationships, tensions in and constraints of State-funded community development activity including the autonomy of community development groups and activities;
- consider strategies for the development of national standards for community engagement (see 2.5 below);
- consider strategies for supporting the development of a stronger evidence base on the impact and outcomes of community development (see 2.4 below);

- consider strategies for supporting the professional development of community development workers (paid and unpaid); (see 2.6 below)
- consider strategies for funding community development;
- consider strategies for strengthening the professional competencies in community development of personnel in government departments and other public service bodies who work in community development policy contexts or with disadvantaged groups and communities (see 2.6 below)

2.2.3 All-island approaches to community development as anti-poverty strategy

The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (section 7.12) outlines that the Irish and UK governments are committed to promoting further North/South consultation, co-operation and common action on poverty social exclusion for the period 2007-2016. It is intended to prepare a report outlining common and current areas of cross-border work and initiatives between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Since 1995, Combat Poverty and Pobal have jointly implemented measures of the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in the border region of Ireland and on a cross border basis. This inter-agency co-operation functions under the title of Border Action. Various measures of these Programmes have supported community development approaches to peace-building and social inclusion. On behalf of Border Action, Combat Poverty has made a separate submission on Community Development and Peace Building, that highlights a number of key points from the experience of work in the border region.

Historically, Combat Poverty has nurtured and developed all-island contacts with regard to poverty and community development. Northern Ireland representation on Combat Poverty's Board and committees have been a long-standing reflection

of this interest⁹. Combat Poverty has established links with the Office of First Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and with a range of other bodies including academic and statutory and within the community and voluntary sector. Currently, it is also part of a consortium working to generate professional standards for community work and to develop mechanisms for the endorsement of education and training on community development on an all-island basis.

Combat Poverty would be pleased to support and be involved in consideration of all-island approaches to community development, as a means of tackling poverty.

Recommendation A

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs should initiate a process to establish a strategic framework for State-support for community development. This process should be initiated in *partnership* with key community development interests across sectors and in accordance with key community development principles of empowerment and participation. It should also consider and embrace the potential for all-island co-operation on community development.

In the context of its statutory remit for community development, Combat Poverty would be pleased to support such an initiative.

2.3 Baseline data

Contemporary Irish community development lacks the availability of national baseline data on the numbers, profile, employment context, work settings and responsibilities, experience, education and training of community development

⁹ For example, the Director of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action is currently a Combat Poverty Board member; a member of the Department of Social Development is a member of a Board Advisory Committee; a member of Community Development and Health Network is a member of a second Board Advisory Committee.

workers in the Republic of Ireland. (Community development workers in the Northern Ireland have been previously surveyed in research undertaken in the UK).

The benefits of a national survey include:

- the development of national baseline data and the strengthening of the evidence-base available to national, regional and local planners regarding the nature and extent of community development approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion;
- the strengthening of the evidence-base available to assess the impact of community development as an anti-poverty strategy;
- the strengthening of the evidence-base available to develop strategies to strengthen the human capital (skills and technical knowledge) of community development workers. Community workers are key 'inputs' in to animating, facilitating and supporting local people experiencing disadvantage to come together to act to improve their communities.

Recommendation B

An independent national survey of community development workers in Ireland should be periodically commissioned. This work should be developed with a number of key community development interests. Arising from Combat Poverty's policy advisory role, its dual statutory functions and expertise in regard to poverty research and community development, it would be pleased to lead such a collaborative initiative as we are currently working on a proposal to pursue work in this area.

2.4 Strengthening the evidence base on the impact of community development as an anti-poverty strategy

Combat Poverty recognizes the importance of evidence-based public policy. Increasingly, programmes that are funded with public monies are required to illustrate the extent to which they reflect the best evidence as drawn from both national and international experience, and also have outcomes that meet their own central aims and objectives.

Strengthening the evidence base on the impact of community development as an anti-poverty strategy has important value in social policy, although this is a particularly complex task given both the multiple dimensions to poverty and the increased involvement of, often, several, stakeholders in collaborative community-based projects.

Combat Poverty has always supported the use of evaluation studies in building an evidence base; the systematic collection of evidence for reflection and review is essential to better understand the experience of community development, to better learn from the experience of community development; to identify the achievements of and obstacles to community development; to plan and prioritise further collective action to improve local communities and to inform the formation of public policy on community development. The findings from Combat Poverty's current work, on the SPEAK system within the Community Development Programme, has relevance in improving this evidence base. (SPEAK is a planning and self-evaluation tool for local community development projects.)

A recent Combat Poverty report¹⁰ summarises a number of evaluations of Irish programmes promoting community development. It concludes that while much is illustrated about the nature of community development activity and about the value of community development, difficulties in identifying the long-term impacts of community development on poverty remain. This study suggests that existing

¹⁰ Motherway, Brian. 2006. *The Role of Community Development in Tackling Poverty. A Literature Review*. Dublin: Combat Poverty

Irish data sets, such as those that pertain to the Community Development Programme, the Family Resources Centres' Programme and the Local Development Programme, merit further analysis and reporting. It also asserts that there is much to be learned from evaluation frameworks that have been produced elsewhere for community development programmes (for example Best Value Performance Indicators for local authorities in England contain community development indicators¹¹). All of this suggests the need to invest further in the development of evaluation strategies for community development thereby increasing the capacity of various community programmes to contribute to evidence-based policies.

It is essential that the principles and values that apply to community development also apply to strengthening the evidence basis of community development.

Recommendation C

That a strategic inter-agency and inter-sectoral approach, employing community development principles and values, is initiated to strengthen the evidence base on the impact of community development as an anti-poverty strategy.

2.5 National Standards for Community Engagement

Participation and engagement of communities is a key principle underpinning community development. As illustrated in 2.2 above, there is an increasing body of public policy that recognises the participation and engagement of communities as being important in the planning and delivery of services to meet local needs. Involvement can take a number of forms, from the simple provision of information through consultation, participation to joint decision-making/co determination, each form building on the previous one. Therefore, there cannot be consultation

¹¹ Department for Communities and Local Government. 2006. *The Community Development Challenge*. London: Communities and Local Government.

without information, there cannot be participation without consultation and there cannot be joint decision-making without participation.

Under the Government White Paper *Regulating Better*, guidelines have been published on consultation by public sector bodies¹². Combat Poverty welcomes and supports this initiative and values the establishment of public service norms and standards in this area.

Combat Poverty is aware that the Scottish Executive has produced and endorsed National Standards for Community Engagement that aim to develop and support better working relationships between communities and agencies delivering public services. The standards are measurable performance statements that can be used to improve the quality and process of the engagement. They set out key principles, behaviour and practical measures that underpin effective engagement.

Recently funded Combat Poverty research identified a number of difficulties experienced by local groups in the context of working in local partnership structures. This report highlighted the need to develop a targeted initiative to improve the structures, processes and outcomes of partnership working with the State in state-led policy arenas that address poverty issues¹³. Combat Poverty suggests that the development of national standards presents an opportunity to enhance the nature and experience of community engagement to address poverty and promote social inclusion.

¹² Department of the Taoiseach (Undated) *Reaching Out. Guidelines on Consultation for Public Sector Bodies*. Dublin: Stationery Office

¹³ Airey, Siobhan. 2006. *Communities, Voices and Change. A report on the policy work of CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships*. Dublin: Combat Poverty

Recommendation D

That an inter-sectoral initiative be established to develop National Standards for Community Engagement. This process should employ community development principles. The implementation of these Standards by public agencies be independently monitored and reported annually. A periodic performance review of the Standards be published by an independent body. Arising from Combat Poverty's statutory function and expertise in regard to community development, it is well positioned to lead such an initiative.

2.6 Building professional development

As stated earlier, community development is understood as an enabling process that empowers local disadvantaged groups and communities to join in collective action to improve their living conditions. This process is commonly resourced through the employment of paid community development workers, in community based, voluntary and statutory settings.

Within local community settings, unpaid community workers, in the roles of volunteers, activists or community leaders, are also common.

Within statutory bodies' at local, regional or national levels, there are also designated community development workers. In addition, there are many staff, who may not have a singular community development focus, but may engage with community development activities or organisations. This is often in the context of planning, implementing or delivering a range of public services and programmes.

Little is empirically known about the profile and mix of paid and unpaid community workers in Ireland or about the roles of other workers (paid/unpaid) who may have community development type responsibilities. For example, Conroy et al (op. cit), in a recent Combat Poverty report, observed that jobs in the field of community development are often advertised without the exclusive

requirement of a specified community development qualification or indeed even a general community development qualification. This may imply that there is a shortage of qualified graduates or that existing graduates are being recruited into other spheres of social activity or that employers undervalue the role of formal qualifications. Alternatively, employers may be seeking to widen the candidate pool of recruitment and to wish to avoid an over professionalised recruitment process.

For some in community development, there is ambivalence about the idea of a professional community worker. Professionalisation fixes and sets standards of learning and practice which apply universally. It offers a secure and certain quality guarantee and establishes clear progression routes between various courses of study. The other side of professionalisation is that it excludes non-professionals who have not attained a sufficient level of education to enter a professional course. It can dampen the aspirations of very experienced practitioners whose experience in the field is not validated in a career path or salary¹⁴. Prior to the relocation of the CDP Programme from Dept of Social and Family Affairs to DCRAGA, bursaries were provided by the former to volunteers on management committees that facilitated their training and education and development. This no longer exists.

Community development in Ireland does not have its own self-regulating professional body or a national standards body accrediting courses or regulating admission or fitness to practice. On the latter, an all-island consortium is working towards the production of professional standards for community work and the establishment of an endorsement mechanism for community work education and training.

¹⁴ Conroy Pauline, Helen O'Leary, Marjorie Mayo. 2006. *Assessing Student Learning Opportunities in Community Development in Ireland*. Dublin: Combat Poverty

A 2006 Combat Poverty study¹⁵ identified the provision of 30 community development related courses in third level education institutions in the Republic of Ireland in 2006. Courses were available at levels ranging from Certificate through to Masters degree and were delivered and managed via a variety of complex methods including:

- Traditional full-time courses offered entirely on-campus;
- Outreach courses;
- Distance learning courses with some visits to a campus or other local centre;
- Courses designed by four different providers and delivered by each of the course designers on a harmonised basis;
- Courses designed by one provider and then franchised out to another provider.

Table 1: Numbers and Levels of Community Development Courses Offered by Third Level Institutions April 2006

Course Level	Numbers of courses	Total
National University of Ireland Certificates	4	
HETAC Level 6 Higher Certificates	6	
National University of Ireland Diplomas	7	
Total of Pre-Degree level courses		17
National University of Ireland and HETAC Level 8 Primary Degrees	8	
National University of Ireland Higher Diploma and Masters Degrees	5	
Doctoral Degrees*	0	
Total of Degree Level courses		13
Total of all courses	30	30

Source: Ralaheen Ltd

¹⁵ Conroy P et al. op. cit

In the course of the study it was observed that some courses had unclear accreditation and their progression routes to further study were not transparent. This observation arose from attempting to establish whether courses were within the National Qualifications Framework or within the European Credit Transfer system. Many of the courses charge fees, especially those that are part-time and oriented to older or mature students. The rationale for the fee structure was not at all clear and similar courses had quite dissimilar charges.

Many of the part-time courses or starter courses did not have student placement opportunities since the students were often already at work. The absence of a supervised placement meant that many students in the community development field had no chance to critically appraise their experiences of working in the field and their application of their learning outcomes.

A further Combat Poverty study¹⁶ recently established that while there are a wide range of agencies, bodies, institutions and structures available to host community development courses/policy courses in both urban and rural environments there is no single set of institutions who provide community development education outside of the higher education sector. There is no single directory of courses in community development by speciality, level or region.

In the above context, there is a need for the development of a strategic framework to support the education and training of community development workers and the professional development of actors in community development at national, regional, local and sectoral-specific levels. This should consider both the pre-service and in-service aspects of being a paid community worker. It should also address issues relating to the education and training of unpaid community workers and workers who may have some community development roles.

¹⁶ Conroy P et al. 2007 This study is currently being finalised. It examines the provision of community development learning opportunities outside of third level education institutions.

The work of the all-island consortium developing professional standards for community work and the establishment of an endorsement mechanism for community work education and training is relevant here. A strategic framework should go beyond this and address wider issues such as accreditation of courses, prior accreditation of learning, the fee structure of courses, bursary provision, public information on the availability and detail of courses, locum cover for serving community development staff who want to study, identifying and supporting the appropriate mix of education and training providers The Dept of Social Welfare had a bursary for course fees, books and travel costs for unpaid and part time staff to do professional courses. Think it might be useful to suggest it re-introduction.

For statutory based workers with community development responsibilities, professional competencies such as an awareness and understanding of poverty and social inclusion, community development and their capacity to effectively engage with groups and communities experiencing poverty are both enabling factors and key tools for the effective formation, design, implementation and evaluation of policies to tackle poverty. Without the appropriate investment in human capital to support the roll out of social inclusion policies, it is likely that the success of the policy, against its stated objectives, may be impeded.

In relation to central government departments, Combat Poverty commissioned research in 2007¹⁷ across seven government departments. Its key findings were:

- There is some, though not a lot, of formal training, development and education on the topics of poverty, social inclusion and community development

¹⁷ Bethel Consulting. 2007. Inservice Education/Training in the Civil/Public Service. Poverty, Social Inclusion and Community Development. Combat Poverty: unpublished

- Some training on these issues has been provided in the Departments of Social and Family Affairs; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Education and Science and Health and Children
- On-the-job experience, attendance at conferences, working with experienced colleagues and team meetings are common 'in-service' ways of staff building their awareness and skills in regard to poverty, social inclusion and community development
- Within government departments, individual staff training plans, developed under Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) can provide for the identification of technical training needs
- In theory, training needs are identified via the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS), though the use of this by line management to identify training needs is mixed
- The PMDS does not include poverty, social inclusion or community development as generic or core competencies.

This suggests that there is scope to enhance the recognition of skills, knowledge and behaviours associated with community development under the PMDS.

As part of its *Local Government Programme*, Combat Poverty provided workshops on community development and consultation and participation techniques for staff in local authorities. Currently it is working on a number of initiatives to support Health Services Executive in this area, in the context of the national roll out of Primary Care Teams.

Recommendation E

Support a process that develops a strategic framework for supporting the professional development of community development workers including building the human capital of community development workers (both paid and unpaid).

Recommendation F

Support a process that develops a strategic framework for strengthening the professional competencies in community development of personnel in government departments and other public service bodies, working in community development policy contexts or with disadvantaged groups and communities.

Combat Poverty would be pleased to advise and collaborate on both of these recommendations.

2.7 Conclusion

Section 2 has identified a range of strategic issues that it believes need to be addressed to strengthen the contribution of community development to tackling poverty. The analysis has drawn on a range of recent research, policy and community development work by Combat Poverty. Six key recommendations are proposed.

Section 3 now goes on to discuss issues regarding the the new Community Development Programme 2007-2013 and makes recommendations on aspects of its formation and implementation.

3. The Community Development Programme 2007-2013

3.1 Introduction

This section of the policy submission responds to a consultation exercise by the DCRAG on how to develop and improve the Community Development Programme for the duration of the current National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013¹⁸.

This section is sub-divided– section 3.2 discusses a number of key strategic issues concerning the development of the Programme while section 3.3 discusses operational issues. Policy recommendations are made under both.

This part of the submission is informed by the research and community development work of Combat Poverty including a process of dialogue with a number of community development projects and other groups working to address poverty.

3.1.1 Strategic development of CDP

The CDP is one strand of a multi-strand approach by public policy to support community development as an anti-poverty strategy in Ireland. Many of the strategic issues relevant to the CDP are linked to a wider strategic framework concerning community development in Ireland. These are discussed in Section 2 and six key policy recommendations are proposed.

In addition to the analysis in Section 2, the following key issues are identified as being central to the strategic development of the next CDP to 2013: These are:

- Defining the Programme characteristics of the CDP
- Articulating the principles of the CDP

¹⁸ Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2 August 2007 www.pobail.ie

- Articulating the links between local community development activity and national policy objectives
- Harnessing and promoting the learning from local community development activity
- The changing nature of poverty and the CDP
- Funding issues
- Technical supports

3.1.2 Defining the ‘National Programme’ characteristics of the CDP

A key question for the future relates to the ‘National Programme’ nature of the CDP. The DCRAAG describes the outgoing CDP as providing financial assistance to community development projects in disadvantaged areas and providing support for self-help work with specific target groups that experience disadvantage. These include Travellers, lone parents, people with disabilities and elderly people who live in isolation¹⁹. While the CDP is nationally funded and administered, the primary setting for actual community development is within local neighbourhoods and/or with particular target groups who are disadvantaged. The CDP was/is unique in that it channels funding and supports directly into disadvantaged neighbourhoods

In dialogue with a range of community development interests as preparation for this submission²⁰, there was a mixed experience of the extent to which the outgoing CDP was considered a ‘national programme’. ‘A collection of individual projects’ or ‘raggle taggle of projects’ are examples of terms used to describe the Programme. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the regional structures of the outgoing CDP and participation on the National Advisory Committee of the outgoing CDP contributed to a sense of being part of a Programme. In this dialogue, a greater profile for the CDP was also called for²¹.

¹⁹ DCRAAG. 2007 *Annual Report*. Dublin: Stationery Office

²⁰ Bassett, M. 2007 *Background paper to inform Combat Poverty submission to DCRAAG on the development of the CDP* (unpublished)

²¹ Bassett, M. 2007 op. cit)

One of the challenges is to design a centrally-administered Programme that:

- allows for the identification of local needs;
- supports the voicing of local concerns;
- facilitates flexibility and the autonomy of local control of community groups;
- and enables people to 'do things' at a local level to improve their communities. that allows for the identification of local needs, the voicing of local concerns.

The structures and processes of a national Programme should reflect the key concept underpinning community development – that people are involved in decisions that affect them. The following characteristics are suggested as key elements to capture the 'National Programme' dimension of the next CDP:

- A national decision-making structure regarding the direction and development of the CDP

Between Programme Managers and projects/agencies of the CDP:

- Shared vision, aim and objectives of a national programme
- Shared concepts and principles of community development
- Shared understanding of poverty and disadvantage
- Shared governance standards for funded projects
- Shared features of management models of funded projects
- Shared features of funded activities and initiatives
- Shared elements of community development practice
- Shared agreement on how to enter and exit the CDP
- Transparent mechanisms for application, decision-making and review of funding proposals
- Shared monitoring and evaluation processes

- Structures for intra-Programme networking particularly for volunteer management committee members.
- Structures for generating, reflecting on and promoting Programme-level learning and issues to relevant audiences including the public policy structures and personnel
- Structures for supporting the professional development of paid and unpaid community workers, volunteers and management committee members e.g. education and training
- National profiling of activities and benefits of Programme
- Other relevant support structures.

The issue of a representative structure for the CDP was highlighted by interviewees in background work undertaken by Combat Poverty in the context of preparing this submission²². There was no overall consensus on how this matter should be addressed though there was some favour for a national representative structure. It was suggested that this would be resourced (by the DCRA and/or independently by projects in the CDP) and that such a structure would be recognised by DCRA and be independent and autonomous.

There were a number of other ideas relating national structures. These included a 'partnership' (meaning not specified) structure with power to influence the direction and operation of the CDP and provide advice to the Minister. A statutory agency or the strengthening of the outgoing National Advisory Committee were suggested. There was general agreement on the need for regional structures (see Technical support).

Recommendation G

The Programme Guidelines for the next CDP should clearly articulate what defines it as a 'National Programme' and outline how this will be realised in its structures, resources and processes.

²² Bassett M. op. cit

3.1.3 Articulating the principles of the CDP

Combat Poverty suggests that the next CDP should incorporate a set of operational principles to guide all actions and activities of the CDP. The extent to which the Programme's operations reflect these should be the subject of an interim review mid-way through the next CDP.

In work undertaken by Combat Poverty to inform the development of this submission²³ it was considered that the CDP lacked a shared vision at national level. The strength and distinctiveness of the Programme was perceived to lie in its espousal of community development principles. It was also considered that there was inadequate understanding and support for the principles and processes at Departmental level, in part due to the extent of staff changes over time. The new deployment of staff, in the context of decentralisation, now offered opportunities for consolidation in this area. The following principles should be incorporated within the next CDP:

These principles should incorporate:

Empowerment – working with people to enable them to take more control of decisions that affect them and their communities

Working collectively – supporting people to come together to identify the things that they want to change in their community and to work together and with others to achieve that change

Participation – people have the right to participate in decisions and structures that affect their lives.

Social justice and equality – community development is concerned to achieve social change that enables individuals, groups and communities to realise their

²³ Bassett M. op. cit

full potential, uninhibited by unfair or discriminatory social structures and systems.

Recommendation H

The next CDP should articulate operational principles (see suggestions above). The extent to which the Programme's operations reflect these should be the subject of an interim review mid-way through the next CDP.

3.1.4 Articulating the links between local community development activity and national policy contexts

Many of the difficult problems people experiencing disadvantage face are neither individual or local. Often the cause and solution of the problem may rest in national policy such as education policy or health policy or in the roll out of national policy at local level e.g. such as the provision of community facilities, play facilities etc. The lived experiences of people experiencing disadvantage and their experience of either community based or publicly provided services is a valuable resource to inform decision-making processes of public policy.

Community development builds on people's experience. Through community organisations, people with poverty-experience bring what has been called insider-experience to public policy making²⁴.

Therefore, one of the challenges for the next CDP will be to articulate, promote and support the inter-relationships between national policy contexts, the Programme and local project activities and outcomes.

Poverty has many dimensions – lack of money, lack of opportunities, lack of resources, exclusion, isolation, poor health, unemployment, lack of transport, educational disadvantage, debt and so on. Community development, as an anti-poverty strategy, will be concerned to address these. It is of value to be able to

²⁴ Lynam, Siobhan. 2006. *Community Development and Public Policy*. Dublin: Combat Poverty

illustrate the connections between what is going on in local communities under the auspices of the CDP and the links between this and relevant policy contexts and policy decisions relevant to tackling the many dimensions of poverty.

However, in the context of making the links between the local community development and national policy contexts, it must be clear that this is not a process to undermine the autonomy of local community development effort. Recent experiences of the 'endorsement process' whereby a role is designated to County Development Boards in regard to the work of local community development processes and some concerns about the local development 'cohesion process' suggest this to be a concern²⁵.

Recommendation I

The next CDP needs to clarify and articulate the anticipated relationships and links between local community development activity and national policy contexts. This may include anticipated impacts of community development activity on policy decisions, structures, processes or outcomes, particularly those concerned with tackling poverty. This articulation needs to value and promote the autonomy of local community development projects, while acknowledging the benefits of having links with related structures and processes.

3.1.5 Harnessing and promoting the learning from local community development activity

Local community development activity can generate many lessons for many purposes. In the context of addressing poverty, lessons for policy and lessons for community development practice are of particular interest.

²⁵ Bassett M. 2007. op. cit; Community Workers' Co-operative. January 2004. *Community Sector disillusioned and frustrated at incoherent, regressive Endorsement Process*; South and Mid West Support Agency research.

In work undertaken for the preparation of this submission²⁶ it was suggested that that policy work is not seen by the DCRAAG as a legitimate activity for projects in the CDP and that it resisted the development of a policy infrastructure within the Programme. They stated that this was exemplified by the removal of funding for regional policy workers. The push to become predominantly service providers was aligned to this also. Correspondence issued from the DCRAAG regarding the purpose of the outgoing CDP reflects the later point:

the: [CDP] is funded to deliver Government policies and provide services in the public interest and it is essential that this is done in an equitable, transparent and non-partisan way.

(The services aspect of community development is previously discussed in section 2.2.)

In a 2006 Combat Poverty study²⁷ the four most frequently cited policy issues for community development projects in the research sample were equality, non-formal education, inter-cultural and anti-racism work and services and facilities. The majority of projects undertook work on multiple policy issues.

The most cited types of policy activities were:

- networking
- joint work on positions and strategies
- participating in policy arenas
- mainstreaming good practice
- responding to requests for policy submissions
- campaigning
- research.

Projects involved themselves in multi-level policy arenas. The types of policy arenas that community development projects participated in included:

²⁶ Bassett, M. 2007. op. cit

²⁷ Airey, Siobhan. 2006 op. cit

Policy participation of CDPs

Level	Arena
Local level	local partnership companies, drugs task force, RAPID area teams, local area networks
Local authority/county level	Traveller Accommodation Committees, Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees, County Development Board, Community Forum, County Childcare committee
Regional	Regional Planning Committee on Violence against Women; Committees convened by statutory or semi-state bodies e.g. FAS Advisory Committee, HSE sub-committees
National	National policy consultations Presentations to Joint Oireachtas Committees National Advisory Committees

The absence of adequate resources to support policy engagement was highlighted as a difficulty for community development projects. The need for policy learning and support needs in a number of areas was also identified. These include knowledge of the policy system, techniques to influence policy and identifying a policy focus to the issues on hand and developing policy responses. These points have also been reiterated in the Combat Poverty's three year Having Your Say Programme which included production of learning materials on policy; national events on supporting the transfer of policy lessons from community development practice; training on policy and research into the nature of learning opportunities on policy for community development workers.

Recommendation J

Policy work by community development projects should be recognised as a distinct project and Programme activity in the Programme guidelines and complements for the next CDP 2007-2013. As an activity, policy work needs adequate targeted resources. Policy support and learning needs should be recognised as a distinct area of requirement within Programme support strategies. These supports need to be monitored and reviewed at regular intervals during the next seven years to facilitate progressive development of policy capacity at project and Programme level and to ensure relevance in an ever changing policy environment.

At a project and Programme level, develop mechanisms that facilitate projects to reflect and analyse their experiences and translate these into policy messages for the lead agencies and departments.

Reflecting its statutory obligations regarding community development, research and policy advice, Combat Poverty would be pleased to advise/collaborate on initiatives in this area.

Recommendation K

In its role as 'sponsor' of the CDP, strengthened internal policy analysis mechanisms should be developed within DCRAAG to refine the policy messages emanating from the CDP and promote these to appropriate Departmental, inter-Departmental and other policy arenas on poverty.

3.2 Operational issues

This section of the submission now considers a number of operational aspects of a future CDP. These include:

- Staffing levels
- Support for volunteers

- The changing nature of poverty and the CDP
- Funding
- Technical support to the CDP.

3.2.1 Staffing levels

In dialogue with community development interests²⁸, the 'two core staff rule' (whereby the core funding available to each project of the CDP is restricted to two staff) was frequently raised as a particular concern. The increased expectations of government Departments and agencies for local community development projects to deliver services to groups which they find hard to reach (discussed in Section 2 above) is perceived to be diluting community development projects' focus on working for social change through empowering and building capacity within disadvantaged areas and groups.

It was indicated that the two core staff allocation does not take account of the scale of operations of many projects in the CDP. In particular it does not take account of the requirement to manage a number of sub-projects simultaneously e.g. childcare, youth services, day-care. The result is that the Project Co-ordinators are line managing a large number of staff and that there is no time for other important aspects of the work e.g. development work, networking and policy work. It was argued that the number of core staff should be related to the scale of the CDP. The point was raised that the Department and other agencies are pushing for projects to take on services but are not putting in the resources to manage these. The degree to which projects in the CDP should be involved in service delivery is a strategic issue within the Programme which has already been highlighted in Section 2.

Projects in the CDP have multiple funders and therefore multiple sets of accounts. This was highlighted as putting pressure on administrative staff and that for many a part time administrator was no longer adequate.

²⁸ Bassett M. 2007. op. cit

A number of other issues have staffing implications including policy work, more intensive support for volunteers, development and outreach work.

Recommendation L

Review the rationale and adequacy of the two core staff commitment within the CDP, taking into account increased expectations of the role, scope and accountability responsibilities of local projects.

3.2.2 Support for volunteers

Voluntary management committees and volunteer activists, unpaid community workers and community leaders characterise many volunteers working in a community development setting. In the context of a new CDP, the role and contribution of people active in their communities in an unpaid capacity should be more strongly recognised and more highly valued.

Findings from background work to inform this submission²⁹ suggest a number of challenges relating to the role of volunteers within the CDP. These include:

- changing nature of Irish society, resulting in people having less time
- need for employers, as part of their role under corporate social responsibility, to recognise the importance of voluntary effort and be prepared to give employees time off
- need for State-sponsored Programme to be more realistic in their expectations of the availability, interest and capacity of volunteers
- the changing role of management committees and the associated 'professionalisation'. This includes fears amongst some members of voluntary management regarding financial and legal responsibilities

²⁹ Bassett M. 2007 op. cit

- the need for considerable resources to support highly intensive capacity building with volunteers in areas such as project management and other areas
- overreliance on paid staff to carry the representational role for communities/projects

It was also stressed that members of marginalised groups need to be supported to reflect on the work and the issues which they are dealing with and to develop analytical skills which allows the structural aspects of poverty and disadvantage to be revealed in an accessible way.

Barriers to encouraging/supporting members of management and others to take on wider roles were identified. These include personal issues relating to confidence, knowledge/ skills. A range of systemic barriers were also identified including access to structures and the culture and ethos of these when accessed e.g. format of meetings, use of exclusionary language, lack of equal respect , lack of understanding of community development.

Literacy and language were also identified as barriers. The latter can refer to English not being volunteers' first language. It also refers to the complex language (jargon) associated with many of the issues under discussion in a community development or policy context . Other barriers identified included access to transport, support for care roles and expenses associated with participation .

Recommendation M

In the context of existing national policy contexts on active citizenship and volunteering, articulate the role of volunteers within the CDP and develop mechanisms to recognise and value their contribution.

Recommendation N

Provide adequate support to projects in the next CDP to support voluntary members to participate in the following areas: contributing to policy formulation; research & evaluation; management & organisational development; developing relationships with statutory agencies and community development.

3.2.3 The changing nature of poverty and the CDP

Poverty is a dynamic concept. Poverty, disadvantage, social exclusion and discrimination are all dimensions of inequality.

As society changes, the nature, extent and experience of poverty changes. In the past, unemployment was the biggest cause of poverty. As a result, the creation of jobs during Ireland's economic boom proved extremely effective in significantly reducing poverty levels. Today, the causes of poverty are more complex. Many people living in poverty experience multiple problems (e.g. educational disadvantage, unemployment, addiction, both physical and mental health problems, disabilities, homelessness, lack of access to transport, rural poverty).

Population growth, immigration and the exceptional economic growth enjoyed by Ireland have all impacted on the causes of poverty, levels of poverty and the profile of people experiencing poverty. However, 18.5% of the population continue to be still at risk of poverty (living on incomes of less than €209 per week) and 7% lives in consistent poverty (living on less than €209 per week and deprived of basic necessities such as adequate food, clothing or heating).

As an anti-poverty initiative, the CDP must be responsive to the changing of poverty in Ireland. Some of the ways this should manifest itself is in the changing nature of target groups that projects of the CDP will work with; the geographical

base of projects; the type of activities initiated or undertaken by projects of the CDP.

The outgoing CDP no longer supported the establishment of new projects. Given the dynamics of poverty this is a concern. It may mean that the Programme will overlook the interests of particular groups or areas emerging into poverty or insufficiently support the interests of groups or areas who persistently experience poverty, disadvantage, discrimination and inequality. These include:

- Travellers
- migrants of various status – including economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers
- larger families (families of four or more children experience high poverty levels)
- older women
- Ex prisoners
- People with mental health issues
- People who are homeless
- Youth at risk
- Substance users etc.
- People disengaged from services.

The need for a gender equality analysis at Programme level of the CDP was suggested in our background research for this submission³⁰. An equality analysis of the CDP, using the nine legislative grounds of equality, would reveal the nature and extent of the CDP's engagement with groups experiencing inequalities (because poverty is not a legislative ground consideration needs to be given to how this could be further addressed in such an initiative).

³⁰ Bassett M. 2007 op. cit

Recommendation O

The bar on new projects within the CDP should be lifted in the context of a Programme for the next seven years to 2013. A transparent process should be established for the entry of new projects within the CDP. The extent and experience of poverty, disadvantage or social exclusion within an area/by a group must be a key criteria in this process.

Recommendation P

Consideration should be given to undertaking an equality analysis at a Programme level of the CDP.

3.2.4 Funding

At a Programme level, the outgoing funding of the CDP amounted to €24m in 2006³¹. A number of projects of the outgoing CDP are concerned at the lack of 'programme funding' in 2007 and indicated that this was causing major difficulties. They also suggested that pressure was being asserted to work with more and more groups e.g. asylum seekers/refugees without additional resources. The extent to which projects of the CDP are able to level other funding is acknowledged in the DCRA's own documentation. However it was reported that the nature of this funding is often for a limited period of time and this does not allow for long term planning and development. It may also not cover management costs. In this context, some projects of the CDP referred to the fact that they are now beginning to charge administration fees but felt they could benefit from guidelines on this³².

Others have identified that Programme support for community development is generally provided on a short term basis in three or fewer years. This may reflect a potential reluctance to commit resources over time to addressing difficult and

³¹ DCRA. 2007. Annual Report 2006. Dublin: Stationery Office

³² Bassett M. 2007 op. cit

complex issues. It is further asserted that there have been examples where funding lines come under threat when there are differences between funders and 'the funded' regarding the way resources have been used. This has included a reluctance to fund research, policy and work aimed at informing and influencing public opinion³³.

The dilemma of funding support for community development being linked to the delivery of services has been previously discussed (see Section 2) but remains relevant here also.

Clearly, in the context of using public monies, it is accepted that there has to be clear accountability. It has been noted that the community development sector, like many public services, is creating more opportunities for managers, at the cost of retaining skilled workers to build the voice and capacities of people and areas experiencing poverty.

Recommendation Q

A seven year funding framework, with interim review, should be a component of the next CDP. This should be an integrated framework and address project level supports - funding for core costs and activities; regional Programme level and national Programme level supports, structures and processes.

Recommendation R

Accountability requirements for funds under the next CDP should be appropriate and take account of projects' requirements under other public funding lines.

3.2.5 Technical supports to the Programme

The range of technical supports to the next CDP should include:

- Building community work skills, knowledge and methods

³³ Lee Anna. 2006. Community Development Issues and Challenges. Dublin: Combat Poverty

- Development of strategies to enable empowerment, participation and representation
- Strengthening management and organizational skills including human resources management
- Strengthening research and evaluation capacity
- Strengthening policy analysis and policy promotion capacity
- Strengthening networking
- Strengthening awareness and practice around quality standards for community work.

The provision of these supports should be accessible, affordable, flexible and structured at project, regional and Programme levels. The potential of ‘peer learning’ within and across the Programme to address these supports could be considered. It is likely that a number of these supports are also requirements of other community development–related Programmes. The potential for cross-Programme learning could also be explored in the context of these Programmes being developed under the National Development Plan to 2013.

In Combat Poverty’s preparatory work for this submission, the role of Regional Support Agencies was commented on³⁴. The majority of the CDP projects interviewed (9 of 13) were happy with the role that their regional support agency played. They felt they were particularly useful regarding the development and support of management committees. They also referred to what they saw as the important part played by support agencies in relation to regional networks. However many of this group still felt that additional funds should be given directly to projects to buy-in specialist training and support.

Others had more mixed feelings regarding the role of regional support agencies, one view being that they suited at the early stages of development of a project but subsequent to this, projects had more diverse and specialist needs and that

³⁴ Bassett M. 2007. op. cit

the training/support budget would probably be better going directly to the projects.

Other points from the dialogue included:

- The functions of Regional Support Agencies could be more clearly enough delineated;
- Need to take account of life cycle of projects and the model currently used is more suited to early stage of development;
- Need to take account of the different and changing contexts of many projects e.g. different issues exercise different projects which may require specialist support such as regeneration
- Need for a pool of specialist supports which is available to all
- More direct funding to projects for specialist supports
- Need for more capacity building for volunteers.

In regard to Specialist Support Agencies (SSAs) the issues identified included:

- Projects may have an inadequate understanding of the role of SSAs;
- Limited financial support for SSAs given their remit to work across the 185 projects of the CDP.

In regard to technical supports the SPEAK package was mentioned by 8 of 13 projects (without prompting) and all saw it as being problematic. A key issue here related to lack of technical support. The findings of Combat Poverty's current review of SPEAK is relevant to this point. It is expected that these will be available by year end.

A few specialist areas were mentioned as needing more support e.g. financial, legal and HR and the need for more resources to support volunteers. It was also felt that the level of work required with more marginalised groups e.g. Travellers requires even more resources for support work.

Recommendation S

Combat Poverty's statutory remits around research, policy advice, public education and community development facilitates it having a direct technical support role to the CDP. In particular this role could apply to maximizing the policy and practice learning from the next CDP. It is recommended that Combat Poverty have a designated role, at Programme level, with regard to evaluation, data collection, research and policy analysis and the development of National Standards for Community Engagement.

3.3 Conclusion

This section has considered a number of strategic and operational issues relevant to the next CDP under the National Development Plan. The focus of the section highlights areas where Combat Poverty considered it was competent and had an evidence base to support its analysis and recommendations.

The issues addressed in Section 2 are also relevant here. Both sections propose policy advice for the formation of public policy on community development.