



Guidelines for Effective Involvement

Combat Poverty Agency
*working for the prevention
and elimination of poverty*



The Department of
Social, Community and
Family Affairs

The Irish
National
Anti-Poverty
Networks



STAKES
NATIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
CENTRE FOR WELFARE AND HEALTH

PART 1: CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

This project was co-funded by the European Commission under the Programme for Preparatory Actions to Combat and Prevent Social Exclusion. It was undertaken by the Combat Poverty Agency (Ireland), in partnership with the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (Ireland), the National Anti-Poverty Networks (Ireland), the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT), STAKES (Finland), I.O. Integrar (Portugal) and Odyssee M.O. (The Netherlands).

Two seminars were held in each of the partner countries, involving the statutory and community and voluntary sectors and people who experience poverty and social exclusion. Learning from all the seminars across the partner countries was shared at a transnational seminar in Dublin in September 2000. The project provided for exchange of experience and information, mutual learning, and the development of an approach that can contribute to improving the design of policies and measures to combat exclusion.

On this basis Guidelines have been developed to inform organisations seeking to involve excluded people and the organisations that represent them in the development, implementation and evaluation of anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies, drawing on learning across the partner countries. It is envisaged that the guidelines will benefit: those with an interest in consultation/involvement; those affected by poverty and social exclusion; those who represent their interests; and those responsible for policy development.

This document is presented in two parts. Part 1 sets out the context for the development of the guidelines. Part 2 presents principles for involvement and practical guidelines.

Combating social exclusion is being given increasing importance at European Union level, and considerable emphasis is being placed on the involvement of excluded people and their representative organisations in the design, delivery and monitoring of EU funded programmes. Building on research commissioned by the Combat Poverty Agency in Ireland¹ this project on involvement was developed.

POVERTY IN EUROPE

Poverty remains a deeply disturbing issue in the European Union. Over 60 million people were living below the poverty line in fourteen Member States of the EU (excluding Sweden)², according to Eurostat figures (1995)³. The data demonstrate that unemployed people are bearing the brunt of poverty, along with young people, older people, large families and lone parents. While unemployment is one of the key causes of poverty, being in employment is not necessarily a safeguard against poverty with 27% of the poor being from the working population.

Behind these statistics is the reality of people experiencing multiple disadvantage with regard to low income and to limited access to the labour market, education, housing, health care, recreational, social and cultural opportunities. The statistics also fail to adequately capture a number of factors which can increase the risk of poverty, including gender inequality, racism and discrimination.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION AGENDA AT EU LEVEL

Early efforts to address poverty at the European Union level came in the form of poverty programmes - specific measures to combat poverty implemented in co-operation with Member States. Three European anti-poverty programmes covered the periods 1975-80, 1985-89 and 1989-94. By the end of the Poverty 3 Programme in 1994, some key concepts and principles had gained wide acceptance, such as multi-dimensionality, partnership and participation. These concepts and principles are still underpinning the approach being taken in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The understanding of social exclusion grew out of the anti-poverty programmes as a dynamic concept that placed the emphasis on the process by which people became poor

¹ Ralaheen Ltd & Community Technical Aid, Dublin 1998

² These figures are based on the poverty line set at 60% of median disposable household income

³ The 1995 statistics are the most recent poverty figures available from Eurostat. It is recognised that there have been changes in the extent and nature of poverty in member states since 1995, as reflected in national poverty figures.

or excluded. This shifted the emphasis away from tackling the consequences of poverty, to addressing the structures and systems which cause poverty and social exclusion. The introduction of the concept of social exclusion has particular relevance for this project, because it presents an approach where people, who are themselves experiencing poverty, are participants in identifying and responding to the processes which lead to them being excluded.

The value of an integrated approach to poverty and social exclusion has long been recognised within the EU, but has gained momentum in recent times. The introduction, in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, of a number of articles strengthened the competencies of the EU in relation to social exclusion (Article 137), and specifically gender equality (Articles 2, 3 and 141), employment (the employment chapter), and anti-discrimination (Article 13). This project has been developed as part of the "Preparatory Actions" under Article 137, in preparation for a programme of Community action to encourage co-operation between Member States to combat social exclusion.

A European Commission Communication *Building an Inclusive Europe* presented on 1 March 2000 has given a new impetus to EU co-operation on combating social exclusion and to implementation of the new Treaty provision agreed in Amsterdam. Under Article 137 "The Council ... may adopt measures designed to encourage co-operation between Member States through initiatives aimed at improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practices, promoting innovative approaches and evaluating experiences in order to combat social exclusion". The Lisbon European Council, held in March 2000, set in place an "open method of co-ordination" between Member States which includes developing national plans to tackle poverty and social exclusion, setting quantitative and qualitative objectives, and periodic evaluation and peer review of the results. This development constitutes the foundation of a European strategy to combat social exclusion and sets the context for these guidelines at the broader level.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF EXCLUDED PEOPLE

At both international and national level, there is a major shift taking place in the understanding and practice of governance (i.e. the taking and influencing of decisions). The realities of economic and technological globalisation, for example, while providing greater opportunities for some parts of society, have also brought about greater marginalisation of individuals and communities, so the need to involve excluded people is growing. The development of guidelines for the involvement of excluded people and the organisations which represent them, takes place in the context of this shift and in the context of civil society.

The term civil society refers to "an arena in which people develop the capacity that will enable them to play a positive role in the economic and political choices that their

societies will have them make".⁴ It includes all organisational life outside the institutions of the State and provides important fora for putting forward the views and concerns of citizens, allowing for divergent views and sometimes conflict. Civil society is coming to play a more active role in shaping socio-economic change and addressing multi-dimensional needs. This is seen as follows:

A more active role for civil society in adopting innovative approaches and technologies to mobilise action at both the policy and practical level;
More co-ordinated and efficient approaches within and between Government institutions (e.g. the drive for more integrated approaches);
Increased dialogue and consultation between Governments and non-Governmental organisations; and Greater transparency and accountability on the part of all the actors in terms of their activities, their priorities and outcomes.⁵

The EU Communication *Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organisations and Foundations in Europe*⁶ refers to the important role that Non Governmental Organisations play and recommends that they be given the opportunity to be involved in planning services and policy-making at all levels. The ability of the community and voluntary sector to provide channels for the active involvement and participation of citizens is fundamental. An active community and voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced for all.

However, power differences exist within civil society. Some parts of civil society are powerful and/or have access to vast resources, while other parts of civil society, particularly the powerless and those that seek to represent the interests of those experiencing poverty and exclusion, cannot access resources from within their own means.

While recognising that civil society operates alongside the institutions of the State, it is also important to recognise that it is not separate from the State. The State provides the framework within which civil society operates and the State can make resources and supports available for the development and operation of organised activity within civil society. In this regard, the institutions of the State can, and should, play a role in directing resources to that part of civil society which cannot access resources through its own means. In return, civil society can, and should, play a role by ensuring that the voices of people who experience poverty or exclusion are heard in policy making and policy implementation.

Participation, at one level, can be defined as an exchange between citizens and government, between those who make policy and people affected by policy choices. For

⁴ Conroy et al - Ralaheen Ltd and Community Technical Aid, Dublin 1998

⁵ Government of Ireland, 2000, *Supporting Voluntary Activity - A White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector, Dublin*

⁶ EU Communication (Brussels, 06.06. 1997)

the purpose of this project, consideration was also given to the exchange between citizens and representative organisations (and vice versa) and between representative organisations and government.

In terms of the relationship between representative and participatory democracy, participation and dialogue allow greater public involvement in governmental action. Such participation must be set in the context of the democratic base of elected representatives. While government is ultimately responsible for making decisions on social and economic policy issues, the context in which these powers and responsibilities are exercised is increasingly one of partnership. Participation is a way of sharing responsibility for policy choices and hence contributes to a wider and more inclusive form of democracy. Participatory processes can make policy and decision making more informed and relevant. Active participation thus deepens the quality of public debate and interest that should, in turn, strengthen the process of representative democracy.

While the parties participating in policy-making have separate roles and responsibilities, they are bound by the mutual need to achieve common aims and to be accountable for the decisions made. Effective involvement requires a commitment on the part of all stakeholders to ensure that excluded people are included in a meaningful way in decision-making processes.

CONTEXT IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

Although internationally there is increased recognition of the value of involving people, the context for the involvement of excluded people and their organisations differs across the member states. This relates to their historical development and the different social, cultural, economic and political contexts pertaining in the member states. This was evidenced by the experiences shared by the representatives of countries involved in this project.

Portugal in the last few years has a very strong commitment to combating poverty and exclusion. New measures such as GMI, the National Programme for Poverty Alleviation, Social Employment market and Integrar known as active social policies, are based on community and individual participation. The aim is to generate sustainable ways of autonomy and personal development involving the State services, local authorities, non profit organisations and local groups of citizens working together, and in net-working in a congregation of efforts, wills and responsibilities.

The "Social Network" is the implementation of a strategy for social intervention that seeks to rationalise and to make more effective the role of those involved in the application of the measures and programmes directed to fight poverty and social exclusion, and at the promotion of social development. It thus seeks to take full advantage of the existing partnerships, based on an overall partnership involving the various sectors and partners from a territorial point of view (Local Social Welfare Councils). The terms of reference of the Social Network stipulate the principles of

integration, articulation, subsidiarity and innovation, and elective participative methodology as the guiding strategy for diagnosis and planning. These policies achieved a new dimension through EU support frameworks, namely enabling research projects and initiatives.

In the Netherlands there is a long tradition of consultation at local, regional and national level. As a result of earlier Social Renewal Programmes client consultation now has a legal base in two fields of action:

- the General Benefit Law: since 1998 article 118 stipulates that local authorities have to report to the National Ministry of Social Affairs on how they promote and organise client participation and consultation on the execution of the General Benefit Law at local level;
- The Law on Client Consultation in the field of Care. Since 1997 a range of institutions in the field of care, welfare and social assistance are obliged to organise forms of client consultation.

Client consultation is often organised in the form of an Advisory Board, or a Council of Clients/users.

This legislation creates an obligation on local authorities and social institutions to consult with local groups of clients before proceeding to new social policies. Particularly excluded people and their organisations now have platforms that have to be consulted with in the development, implementation and evaluation of anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies.

In most of the situations the local, regional and national organisations of "people at risk" (elderly, single parents, long term unemployed, homeless, disabled, working poor, etc) are facilitated to participate in these Boards and Councils. Professional assistance, training and costs for travelling and communication with their target groups are available in most cases.

In Northern Ireland extensive consultation is not uncommon. The concern, however, is that there is 'over-consultation' but 'under-involvement'. In many cases the time-scale allowed is too short, there is little funding invested in the exercises, traditional methods have been used, the agenda and the parameters are set by statutory agencies alone, there is rarely feedback to participants, and the value of the process is not always apparent. As a result 'consultation fatigue' is widespread and new models for involvement are required.

Northern Ireland has a strong, well-organised voluntary and community (NGO) sector that is anxious to find ways of including a greater variety of people, and particularly marginalised people, in more active participation in the making and implementation of policies, and to develop and use a greater variety of approaches. A 'Compact' between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, agreed in 1999, sets out shared values and respective roles and responsibilities, and provides a framework for the

further development of the relationship at every level. This has particular significance in respect of policies and programmes tackling poverty and exclusion i.e. 'New TSN' (launched in 1998) that builds on previous efforts but includes a particular focus on combating problems of unemployment (particularly long-term unemployment) and increasing employability. It aims to tackle inequalities in health and housing, and the 'Promoting Social Inclusion' (PSI) Initiative which is intended to be a co-ordinated approach to tackling causes of exclusion.

It has, however, been through legislation (under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998) that **mainstreaming** equality has been achieved. The new statutory duty, which grew out of the previous non-statutory Policy and Fair Treatment initiative and from the Good Friday Agreement, makes equality central to the whole range of public policy decision-making. In particular it will assist public authorities to effectively and efficiently address issues of equality, targeting disadvantage and social need and promoting social inclusion in policy development and implementation. Public authorities are now required to produce an Equality Scheme (including arrangements for consultation and details of the persons to be consulted).

Finally, the Civic Forum (comprising 61 members representative of the business, trade union, voluntary and other sectors), established as part of the new institutional framework for devolved administration in Northern Ireland, provides a new consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural matters.

In Finland there is limited consultation with civil society, with a centralised approach to the development of socio-economic policies. As in other Nordic countries, the public sector assumes more responsibility for providing welfare services than in other parts of Europe, resulting in civic movements having a weaker status.

Finland is a late-comer in industrialisation and economic wealth. Modern social security (or social protection systems in modern EU-language) have been developed since 1960s and until the end of the 1960s poverty was widespread. The main features of Finnish welfare state are **comprehensiveness** (the scope of public policy is broad), **high rate of employment, equality, universality** (right to basic social security benefits), **high quality benefits and services, generous benefits**. It could be said that Finland has been (and still is) a very state dominated society where the role of NGO's and citizen movements have not been very strong. Thus the Nordic model tradition is one where the public sector has a central role of in providing social security, health and social services. The main responsibility for the provision of welfare services lies with the public sector. The private sector and NGO's have a complementary role. Formal discussions take place between the State and NGO's. It means e.g. in new legislation statements regarding experiences of poverty are requested from the representatives of NGO's. However, the political agenda is created by civil servants and politicians.

In Ireland, national partnership agreements allow for the involvement of the social partners in the development of three-year plans relating to all aspects of public policy,

including social inclusion strategies. There is on going consultation between the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Unit of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Anti-Poverty Networks in relation to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. At local level, new consultation mechanisms in the form of Strategic Policy Committees are emerging as part of the local government reform process. The White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity, A White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*,⁷ provides the context for involvement, giving formal recognition to the partnership ethos that informs much of the working relationship, while recognising the differences between the sectors, and delivering a range of practical measures to support and strengthen the relationship.

⁷ Government of Ireland (2000), *Supporting Voluntary Activity, A White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*, Dublin.

PART 2: GUIDELINES

RATIONALE

The establishment of a wide and differing range of participatory mechanisms and contexts across EU Member States resulted in a focus by this project on 'involvement' to facilitate wide adaptation of the Guidelines. Within this, the difference between consultation and decision-making should be acknowledged and applied to the particular circumstances in which 'involvement' occurs.

Participatory approaches place significant demands on all those involved, but have considerable advantages. The importance of involvement as a right is gaining recognition, but involvement also contributes to:

- Improved and more relevant policy making - perspectives are shared, problems are anticipated, responsiveness is increased, more tailored solutions
- Increased "mobilisation" of society to combat poverty utilising a wider range of strategies and resources;
- Wider ownership of policy, recognising the inter-dependence of the State and civil society;
- A more equitable and inclusive society, through keeping poverty and social exclusion on the agenda;
- Improved accountability for policy outcomes;
- Increasing the skills, knowledge and confidence of participants; and
- Fostering responsible citizenship.

BARRIERS

A range of barriers can prevent meaningful involvement. Barriers to be overcome by all stakeholders before involvement can be achieved include:

Institutional/Political

- Stigmatisation and stereotyping of excluded people
- Tokenism on the part of those leading the process
- Under-representation of excluded people
- Language and communication
- Unwillingness to share power
- Professional elitism

Cultural

- Apathy and/or self-interest
- Lack of trust
- Inappropriate level of expectations

Physical

- Lack of child/social care facilities
- Transport
- Location of meetings
- Access for people with disabilities

Technical

- Lack of information, knowledge and analysis
- Practical considerations - time constraints and timeliness, size of the process, cost
- Lack of community infrastructure
- Lack of skills and experience in methods to involve excluded people
- People lacking the skills and experience to participate

Economic

- Poverty
- Inadequate financial resources/costs of involvement

Drawing on the learning from this project, a set of guidelines for involving excluded people and the organisations which represent them is proposed in regard to the development, implementation and evaluation of social inclusion and anti-poverty policies. The guidelines are presented in the form of principles and a menu of actions. The guidelines are considered to be applicable, not just in relation to the institutions of the State involving representative organisations and the poor themselves in policymaking, but also with regard to the relationship between representative organisations and their constituency.

PRINCIPLES

The following core principles are considered to be applicable to all stakeholders at all stages of a process to involve excluded people.

- **Inclusion** – involving all relevant stakeholders and enabling them to participate. This includes a commitment to positive action for particular target groups, if appropriate.
- **Equality** – a commitment to fair treatment of all stakeholders
- **Accessibility** – providing the necessary enabling supports to overcome barriers to involvement to ensure the inclusion of people in the process e.g. accessible information, premises.
- **Partnership** – working in partnership through co-operative methods. Partnership imposes a duty on all partners to contribute appropriately and to honour any agreement made. Power differences should be acknowledged, while each partner retains their independence.
- **Transparency** – being open and clear in relation to the objectives, the constraints, and to the outcomes of the consultation/involvement processes.

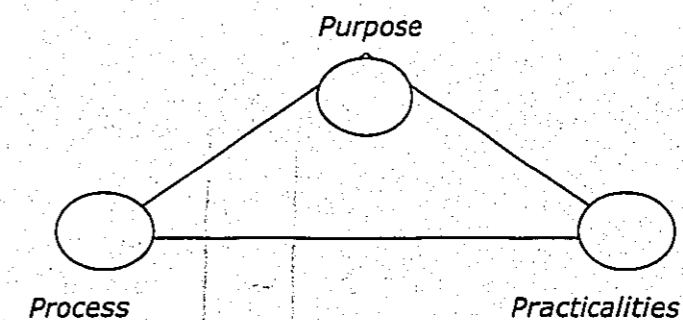
- **Accountability** – being responsible for feeding back the outcomes of the consultation/involvement process to their constituencies and being accountable for the outcomes.
- **Empowerment** – sharing power between the stakeholders. Thus, the process contributes to skills development, confidence building and people being more informed.

GUIDELINES – MENU FOR ACTION

In order for the guidelines to be relevant and applicable across all member states, a flexible framework is required that can be adapted to specific circumstances and to deal with individual and collective viewpoints. It is important to acknowledge the barriers listed above and to find a means of overcoming them. A menu is proposed that can be used under a variety of circumstances and at a number of different levels.

The three factors of purpose, process, and practical implications underpin good practice in involvement. They should be considered from the perspective of those responsible for inclusion and anti-poverty strategies and excluded people and organisations representing them. Each of these inter-dependant factors is essential for the successful operation of the process of involvement:

The figure below illustrates this relationship:



The nature of the interdependence and the relative importance of the respective elements depend on:

national context – centralised/decentralised, strength of civil dialogue; and
scope of the issue – multi-faceted/narrowly focused, on-going/once off.

It is important to note that while purpose, process and practicalities are important elements of the involvement process, the ultimate objective – the intended outcome – of the process is key i.e. working together to achieve an outcome which will better people's lives.

Purpose

WHAT

Clearly establish and communicate the purpose, objectives and expected outcomes of the process.

Recognise the boundaries of the process.

Clarify the final decision-making forum.

HOW

Ensure that all stakeholders understand and agree these. This should initially be done by the initiating organisation(s), with sufficient flexibility to allow participants to comment and advise on these.

Acknowledging the limitations/constraints to the consultation/involvement processes such as timescale, resources, legal obligations and the extent of involvement possible.

While consultation/involvement should inform the decision-making process, final decisions will ultimately have to be made by those formally responsible or by consensus between the stakeholders. This must be clarified at the outset.

Process

WHAT

Establish terms of participation.

Ensure that the topic and exercise are relevant to those you involve.

Build the capacity of the stakeholders.

HOW

These terms should outline the practical arrangements and working methods of the consultation/involvement process. They should be agreed with the stakeholders.

Involvement exercises should address the concerns of the stakeholders and be relevant to their lives and interests. Ways in which this might be achieved are through (clearly targeted, rather than broad, consultations and/or) building ongoing feedback into service provision.

It is recognised that capacity building may be required to facilitate meaningful involvement. This might include skills'

development, confidence building and preparatory work at a pre-involvement stage. It would also include being open to other two-way or bottom-up channels of communicating needs. Certainty of funding should be available to build the capacity of stakeholders to participate.

Build organisational commitment.

Develop an ongoing process through the various stages of policy development, implementation and evaluation.

While individual "champions" are often necessary for effective involvement to take place it is essential that a commitment to involvement be built into organisational routines.

While it is recognised that there is a finite time period for each stage of the involvement process e.g. consultation on development and/or implementation and/or evaluation of a policy or programme, there must be a commitment to keeping people involved over each of these stages.

Practical Implications

WHAT

Information

Provide timely preliminary information about the involvement process.

Share information throughout the process.

Ensure information is accessible.

HOW

It is important that all stakeholders are informed about the involvement exercise, its purpose, time-scale, the implications for the stakeholders, what is being done, what can be done and how stakeholders can participate.

Circulate information throughout the process to publicise what is happening and share the results and outcomes of the involvement exercise.

Ensure that information is made available

in places and in formats accessible to all stakeholders, for example use straightforward language, Braille, tape, etc.

Resources

Provide resources for groups and individuals to be involved.

This should include resources for capacity building and training as appropriate, at pre-involvement stages and through-out the involvement exercises.

Cover participation costs for those experiencing exclusion or living in poverty.

These might include childcare, eldercare and transport. They should be anticipated and provided for as appropriate.

Allocate staff resources to undertake and participate in the involvement process. It is recognised that involvement processes require staff time.

Provide appropriate facilities to enable the involvement to take place.

Ideally this should take place as close to the target groups as possible, in an accessible facility suitable to the objectives of the involvement exercise and the needs of the participants. It is recognised that in some instances this may require out-reach work.

Methodology

Use appropriate ways of involving people.

A variety of approaches can be employed – for example, the use of creative and culturally appropriate approaches, building on existing services, allowing sufficient time for people to think about what they want to say, and organising meetings to let people get to know each other and to build up trust. The use of jargon and complicated language should be avoided if at all possible. At times the utilisation of specialised staff, skills and mediators may be helpful.

Respect the dignity of individuals.

The right of people experiencing poverty

and social exclusion to respect should be upheld. Involvement should always be undertaken on a voluntary basis and be facilitated rather than imposed.

Review, feedback and evaluation.

Review the progress of the involvement process at regular intervals.

This involves "checking in" with the other stakeholders at intervals that the process is progressing as agreed at the outset. Revision should be made and agreed as necessary.

Provide regular and accurate feedback.

Feedback should be provided on the role/outcome the involvement process played in formulating policy and the reasons for decisions.

Learn from and build on previous experience and existing models of involvement.

This places the onus on all those involved to document the models they develop and to make this information available. In addition, where possible, evaluations of involvement processes should be undertaken, with the involvement of all stakeholders. Exchange of experience and good practice should be promoted at local, regional, national and transnational levels.

FINAL REMARK

Statement from the Transnational Seminar on hopes for the future.

The project participants hope that these guidelines will contribute to the realisation of this vision.

- That a strong and dynamic EU social policy will be built on the views, experiences and insights of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
- That no national or local policies/strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion will be planned or implemented without the involvement of excluded people.
- That no policies will be assessed for their impact on poverty without the involvement of excluded people.

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1. The seven Irish National Anti-Poverty Networks are the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN Ireland), the Forum for People with Disabilities, the Irish National Organisation of the unemployed (INO), Irish Rural link (IRL), the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM), One Parent Exchange Network (Open) and the Community Workers Co-operative (CWC).

Involving Excluded People and their Organisations in Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Policies

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