



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

AN ANTI-POVERTY TRAINING HANDBOOK FOR
LOCAL AUTHORITIES



Department of Social and Family Affairs



AN ROINN COMHSHAOIL, OIÐHREACHTA AGUS RIALTAIS ÁITIÚIL
DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE
AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT



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*working for the prevention
and elimination of poverty* Agency

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Anti-Poverty Training In Local Government

These materials are designed to support local authority staff to understand the extent and nature of poverty and provide helpful guidelines in addressing poverty within a local authority setting. They have been developed as a guide, to provide background information, to summarise the national agendas and to prompt or suggest actions or approaches that local authorities might like to take.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was first produced in 2001. This is its second update; it was previously updated in 2005. Combat Poverty Agency would like to acknowledge the work of Mark Conway and Maureen Bassett, in addition to all of the local authorities and community groups, who contributed case studies to the guide.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE MATERIALS?

These training materials have been developed by Combat Poverty as part of its approach to the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion. Although anti-poverty work has been given increased attention at national policy level, it has long been recognised that many of the most effective anti-poverty 'gains' are those made at local level. Local authorities themselves have been very aware of this point.

Thus, these materials are simply aimed at supporting local authorities to become better equipped to address poverty in their own localities, in whatever form it might take.

HOW WERE THEY DEVELOPED?

These updated materials were developed using three approaches. Firstly, they draw on the substantial experience--developed over the past 20

years--of the Combat Poverty Agency. Secondly, they continue to broadly reflect the needs which local authorities themselves have identified. Thirdly, they recognise the many changes that have developed in terms of poverty and exclusion over the past three years. These changes include:

- ◆ shifts in the nature and extent of poverty and exclusion;
- ◆ ongoing and new government responses to poverty and exclusion;
- ◆ progress in terms of how local authorities recognise and address poverty and exclusion.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE MATERIALS?

The materials aim to provide a sense of what poverty is and how it can be addressed. In sequence, therefore, they cover the following areas:

- ◆ poverty in Ireland: definitions and facts;
- ◆ what is currently being done to address poverty;
- ◆ how might we measure poverty locally?
- ◆ whose views should we seek, and how?
- ◆ developing a Local Anti-Poverty Social Inclusion Strategy (LAPSIS);
- ◆ case studies



ACTIVITY

USING CASE STUDIES

Individual Reflection

Read each case study and reflect on the following questions:

1. What were the key actions taken?
2. What potential/actual outcomes were there from the actions?
3. What contribution do you think the approach/actions could make to tackling social exclusion?

Group Exercise

1. Distribute one case study to members in small groups.
2. Ask each group to read and discuss the questions outlined above.
3. Note feedback on a flip chart.
4. Focus the discussion on the contribution to tackling social exclusion and applicability in the groups' own local authority context.

THE CHALLENGES FACING LOCAL AUTHORITIES

These materials on their own will not provide an anti-poverty 'solution' for local authorities. However, it is hoped they will assist local authorities to address poverty at local level. Historically, many local authorities have seen their anti-poverty work in terms of providing housing or, more recently, in terms of what is achieved under the Community and Enterprise and social inclusion banner. But there is an increased awareness of the impact that other services have on the quality of life of disadvantaged and marginalised people. What could authorities do to add or improve facilities in their housing estates, for example? Is there a connection between street lighting and local quality of life? How could libraries be used to address disadvantage? To be really effective in their anti-poverty work, local authorities will need to use this type of lateral thinking and questioning.

There is a need to develop an anti-poverty focus across all function areas within local authorities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF VALUES

Local authority anti-poverty work should be policy-driven and strategy-driven. It should be central to what we do and to what we are trying to achieve.

Our work here should also be value-driven. Values are what shape and guide how we do things. They are the beliefs and connections that support behaviour and attitudes. They provide an operating framework that's just as necessary and powerful as, for example, standing orders.

A strong and living value base is vital in anti-poverty work. The real danger in defining values is that we produce a list of them simply because it's seen to be the done thing. Values need to be taken seriously. We need to choose and articulate values that are meaningful and appropriate; that will make a difference. In developing the original National Anti-Poverty Strategy (see Section 3) seven values were adopted. It is appropriate for us to reflect these in our anti-poverty work:

- ◆ ensuring equal access and encouraging participation for all;

- ◆ guaranteeing the rights of minorities, especially through anti-discrimination measures;
- ◆ reducing inequalities and, in particular, addressing the gender dimensions of poverty;
- ◆ building on national and local partnership processes, thus developing the partnership approach;
- ◆ actively involving the community and voluntary sector;
- ◆ encouraging self-reliance through respecting individual dignity and promoting empowerment;
- ◆ engaging in appropriate consultative processes, especially with users of services.

CHOOSING OUR VALUES CAREFULLY

A European Union initiative (undertaken by the Combat Poverty Agency in partnership with the Office of Social Inclusion and others) under the Programme for Preparatory Actions to Combat and Prevent Social Exclusion was completed at the end of 2000. It was felt that all processes to involve previously-excluded people could be built around these core principles or values:

***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 ensuring 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 his/her 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.*

ACTIVITY

EXPLORING VIEWS ON POVERTY IN IRELAND

Below are some views on poverty in Ireland. It can be useful to take time to consider these and other beliefs about poverty, as this can help clarify our own views. This is important preparation work when setting out to develop an anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy. These could also be used to prompt discussion amongst colleagues who will be involved in developing and implementing such a strategy. It is very important when developing a strategy to ensure that all of the stakeholders in the strategy share a common understanding of the issues, as well as a common vision regarding the aim of the strategy.

There is no real poverty in Ireland compared with countries in the 'Third World'

Poverty has to be understood where it occurs, that is, relative to the standard of living in the society under consideration

Poverty occurs because some people don't know how to manage their money

No amount of budgeting can stretch an inadequate income. Many people on low incomes show great skill in managing scarce resources

Until very recently (can we qualify this) there were opportunities for everyone and therefore no reason for anyone to be poor

Because of patterns of poverty dating back to the recession in the 80's, some children and families have been caught in a cycle of poverty that makes it difficult for them to avail of opportunities, e.g. low levels of education



ACTIVITY

Values Exercise

- ◆ ensuring equal access and encouraging participation for all;
- ◆ guaranteeing the rights of minorities especially through anti-discrimination measures;
- ◆ reducing inequalities and, in particular, addressing the gender dimensions of poverty;
- ◆ building on national and local partnership processes, thus developing the partnership approach;
- ◆ actively involving the community and voluntary sector;
- ◆ encouraging self-reliance through respecting individual dignity and promoting empowerment;
- ◆ engaging in appropriate consultative processes, especially with users of services.

My Top Values

- a) **Decide on three values that you would prioritise; be clear why you are choosing these. Is there another value, not on the list, which you would choose?**
- b) **Note two or three actions which could put the value into action within a local anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy.**

1.

2.

3.

2

Setting the Context: Poverty in Ireland Today

INTRODUCTION

In this section we want to give definitions of poverty and provide facts about how it is manifest in Ireland in the 21st century.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE TERM POVERTY?

Before we even consider how we might develop and implement an anti-poverty strategy in our own local government setting, it is essential that we have an understanding of what it is we want to address. This is not to say we want to enter into great philosophical debates about poverty. But we do have to fix a starting point or focus for our work. We need to have clarity about what we mean when we talk about poverty.

Like many things in life, poverty is relative. What we might describe as poverty in Ireland could equally well be seen as affluence in large parts of the developing world. There is little value, therefore, in trying to develop absolute measures of poverty that are appropriate in all settings. We just can't measure poverty as we might measure distance, temperature or size.

The traditional understanding of poverty in Ireland was fairly basic, i.e. it had simply to do with people's lack of money or resources. 'Poor people' were those who either had no money or not enough. In the late 19th century and for much of the 20th century, 'the poor' were regarded as a fact of life. Those who were poor were seen to be so because either they were feckless and/or work-shy ('the undeserving poor') or because fate had conspired against them through injury, sickness or other 'acts of God' ('the deserving poor').

Society's response tended to focus on the needs and circumstances of 'the deserving poor' but to do so from a charitable perspective, i.e. it was a worthy thing to help the less well off.

Increasingly, however, government took a wider view of poverty and began to consider questions such as:

- ◆ are there structural causes of poverty and what might those be?
- ◆ what are the consequences of poverty for individuals; communities; and society generally?
- ◆ how might those causes and effects of poverty be addressed?

For two decades now, government in Ireland has been developing its position and response in terms of those questions.

If we are to tackle poverty, however, we must first know what it is, what it looks like and how much of it there is. The current, widely accepted definition of poverty is that put forward by the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (see Section 3 below):

“People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society.”

The key point made here is that poverty is not just about an absence or shortage of money –even though that is crucial. Poverty is really about people being excluded from the good things in life and from activities that are accepted as the norm for everyone in Irish society. Exclusion is something that is hugely damaging to individuals and to communities.

ACTIVITY

DEFINING POVERTY IN IRELAND¹

- (a) 'Poverty is about not having a job at all or having a dead-end, low-paid, insecure job that you could be out of in no time.'
- (b) 'Poverty means your income is not enough to have or do the things that most people in your community think is fair.'
- (c) 'Poverty is a child who has never seen the seaside.'
- (d) 'Being poor in Ireland means that you don't get the same opportunities as others to have a good standard of living.'
- (e) 'Poverty is all to do with discrimination – being treated unfairly because of the place you grew up, your social class, the colour of your skin or your cultural or ethnic background.'
- (f) 'Poverty is about destitution and people dying of starvation.'
- (g) 'Poverty means being taught nothing about your own history but all the time learning about settled people's. It's being told all the time that there is something wrong with being a Traveller.'
- (h) 'Poverty is about not being able to pay the ESB or the rent or scrimping to get enough money together to buy the children's clothes.'
- (i) 'A family is poor if it can't afford to eat.'
- (j) 'Poverty means having no choice. If you're lucky you can afford the cheapest things.'
- (k) 'Being poor means that you simply can't do the things that people who are better off take for granted – go out regularly, get involved in clubs, take holidays.'
- (l) 'Living in poverty is just one constant worry – wondering and worrying about how to make ends meet.'

¹ This exercise is adapted from Basset, M and Haran, N, *Left Outside?: Combat Poverty*, 2006, p. TK

Suggestions for using these quotes:

1. As an individual exercise:

Identify the three statements you most agree with and why?

Identify three statements you most disagree with and why?

Keep a note of your choices and revisit them later in the process of developing an anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy.

2. If you have the opportunity to work with relevant colleagues on the issue of defining and understanding poverty, e. g. as part of a training session; the following outlines an interactive method:

- i. copy the statements on to individual strips and place them on the walls around the room;
- ii. ask participants to walk around, read them and then stand by the one they most agree with
- iii. take a selection of choices and responses and encourage discussion;
- iv. check if anyone wants to change their position based on the discussion;
- v. check if any of the statements were not chosen and why;
- vi. conclude the exercise by flagging the definition of poverty contained in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion .

Poverty in Practice

For people in poverty, and/or who are socially excluded, life on a daily basis can mean:

- ☹️ struggling to make ends meet on an inadequate income
- ☹️ being out of a job
- ☹️ living in poor housing
- ☹️ getting into debt
- ☹️ feeling discriminated against
- ☹️ suffering from poor health, physical or psychological
- ☹️ having fewer educational opportunities compared with those who are more well-off
- ☹️ surviving on an inadequate diet
- ☹️ having few social, cultural or recreational opportunities

ACTIVITY

The following are direct quotes from people experiencing poverty²

- ◆ 'I find it hard to cope. All the borrowing I have to do and then worrying about paying it back. It's a struggle all the time.'
- ◆ 'My future is getting dinner on the table. My future is making the money last the rest of the week. I just live day to day.'
- ◆ 'With some people whether they're your friends or not depends on what you wear. People don't like friends who don't have brand-name clothes.'
- ◆ 'I wouldn't ask anyone. I do without. You get used to having no money.'
- ◆ 'Sometimes the food goes pretty low. I won't let them go to school if they've had no breakfast.'
- ◆ 'You're terrified in your own home. That's the way it is up here.'
- ◆ 'You don't know what's going to happen.'
- ◆ 'I remember one night when I picked up the baby. He was only a few weeks old. The child was freezing.'
- ◆ 'It always comes back to the finances. That determines what kind of lifestyle you have – it can determine whether your marriage stays or goes.'
- ◆ 'I'm waiting six years for a by-pass. If I had a cheque book, they'd have me in straight away.'
- ◆ 'I feel kind of guilty when mammy and daddy leave themselves without anything and we get all the stuff.'
- ◆ 'The kids are walking around the streets and there's nothing around for them. Then they ask why kids get into trouble. It's all money, money, money. If only there was something for the kids

² Taken from Daly, M. and Leonard, M., *Against All Odds: Family Life on Low Income*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration and Combat Poverty Agency, 2002.

to do that didn't cost loads of money.'

- ◇ 'The only way I know is from booklets on what I'm entitled to. But it's a different language. When I bring them home, I can't make head nor tail of them.'
- ◇ 'Well some days we don't have a meal to eat. We depend on the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The bits of grub I get from them help me through the days.'

Experience of Poverty: using the quotes

- a. Read the quotes and note the key issues identified in them, also note the feelings that are explicitly stated or implied.
- b. Are you surprised by any of the quotes?
- c. What implications have they for the work you do in the local authority and for the overall work of the authority?
- d. Reflect on how you might share the insights gained after completing this exercise with colleagues.

WHAT DOES POVERTY 'LOOK LIKE'?

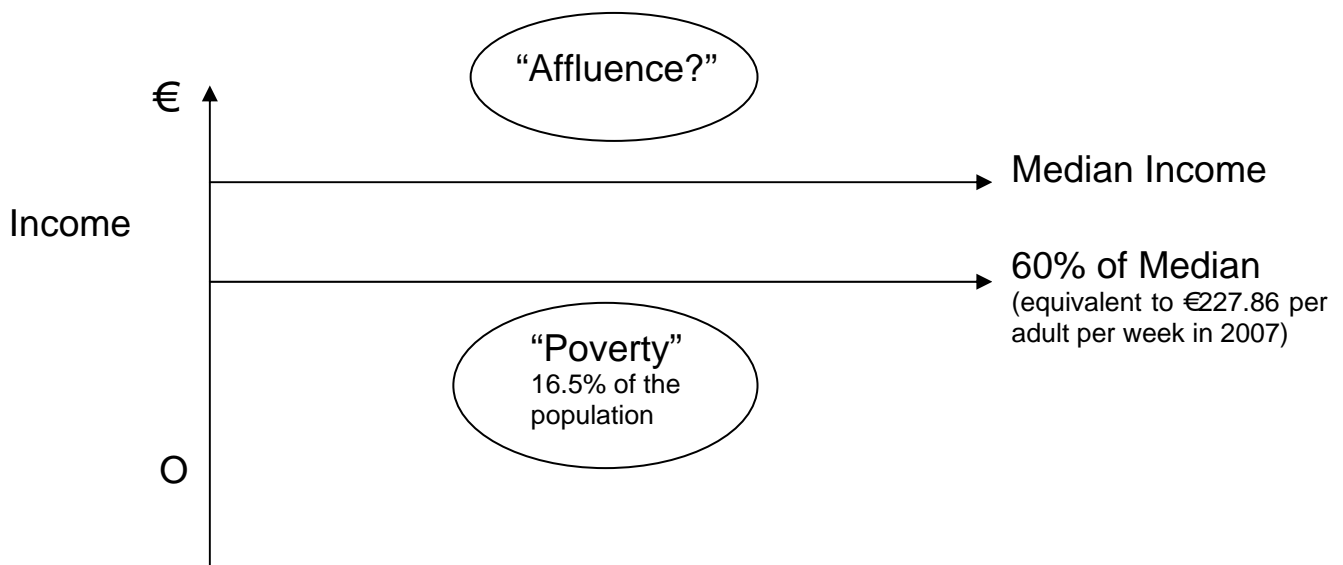
Even if we accept this understanding of what poverty means for people, we need to be able to quantify or measure it in some way. This is particularly the case for organisations within the public sector. In these types of organisations, we tend to be concerned with poverty largely because we want to do something about it. We want to target it; attack it; reduce it; maybe even remove it. But what precisely is the 'it'?

There are two ways of measuring poverty:

- A purely income measure—called 'at risk of poverty'—is used by the EU as part of the 2006 revised set of common indicators of social protection and social inclusion agreed by Member States.
- A combination of income and deprivation—called 'consistent poverty'—is used by the Irish government to frame its poverty targets.

'At risk of poverty' describes those who are below 60% of the median income as poor (the median smoothes out the effect of those households on extremely high incomes). In 2007, 16.5% of Ireland's population (that is 699,575 people) fell below this 60% line:

At Risk of Poverty



The second perspective in terms of measuring 'consistent poverty' looks at income and a set of basic deprivation indicators. The consistent poverty measure was devised in 1987 and noted that a person had to be income poor and lack one or more items from an eight-item list. In 2007, the Government took the advice of the ESRI to revise the deprivation indicators. Now a person has to be income poor and lack two or more items from an eleven-item list. These indicators are based on the absence, through necessity rather than choice, of everyday items for living. The list of deprivation indicators is:

- ◆ keep the home adequately warm;
- ◆ eat meals with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day;
- ◆ eat a 'roast' or an equivalent once a week;
- ◆ own two pairs of strong shoes;
- ◆ own a warm, waterproof coat;
- ◆ wear new—instead of second-hand—clothes;
- ◆ having to go without heating in the last year due to lack of money;
- ◆ buy presents for family or friends at least once a year;
- ◆ replace any worn out furniture;
- ◆ have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month;
- ◆ have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight, for entertainment

In 2007, 5.1% (that is 216,232 people) of Ireland's population had an income of less than 60% of the national median **and** experienced at least two of the eleven deprivation indicators. These people are deemed to be in consistent poverty.

Consistent poverty is measured at the national level only in Ireland. That means county or city-specific figures are not available.

HOW HAVE THINGS BEEN CHANGING?

We've stressed the points that poverty is both relative and dynamic: it's not a static thing. Presented below are some indications of how things have been changing—or not changing—in Ireland over the past decade.

	2004	2005	2006	2007
At Risk of Poverty (% of people below the 60% median)	19.4%	18.5%	17%	16.5%
Consistent Poverty (% of people below the 60% median and lacking at least two of the deprivation items)	6.6%	7%	6.5%	5.1%

Source: EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC): CSO December 2007

Living Conditions (EU SILC). The survey not only provides hugely valuable information on income poverty and deprivation (discussed above) but also uncovers other important correlations. Among those are:

Consistent Poverty

- ◆ Consistent poverty is high for households of all compositions, but those in lone-parent households had by far the highest risk, at 20.1%.
- ◆ Consistent poverty was high, at 15.3%, for those in households headed by an unemployed person.
- ◆ People in households headed by an ill or disabled person had a 21.9% risk of consistent poverty.

- ◆ 39.1% of all people in consistent poverty were children.

At Risk of Poverty

- ◆ 16.5% of the population were below the 60% median income line in 2007, while 26.8% were below the 70% line. For a single person, the 60% line was approximately €227.86 per week, and the 70% line was about €265.84 per week.
- ◆ Persons in households whose head was unemployed had the highest risk of relative income poverty in 2007. These households saw a decrease in risk, from 57.1% in 2006 to 53.9% in 2007.
- ◆ The risk of poverty rate for older people increased from 13.6% in 2006 to 16.6% in 2007. This increase was most noticeable for older people living alone, from 19% in 2006 to 24.3% in 2007.
- ◆ 25.3% of women involved in home duties were recognised as being at risk of poverty.
- ◆ At 48.6%, the risk of income poverty for those in households headed by a person who was not at work due to illness or disability remained high.
- ◆ At 7.3%, the lowest risk of poverty is faced by those in households headed by an employed person.
- ◆ Children had the highest risk of poverty of any age group, with one in five being at risk of poverty (19.9%) in 2007.
- ◆ Lone-parent households with children had the highest risk of income poverty, at 37.6%.

AND WHY IS IT LIKE THAT?

In the next section, we will look at some of the strategies that are in place to address poverty in Ireland. One of these is the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* which identifies a number of priorities set out by government to address poverty.

Two of those priorities are Income Adequacy and Consistent Poverty, which have already considered above. The others are discussed briefly below:

Employment

Employment remains a critical element in any consideration of poverty. The correlation between unemployment and poverty is well proven: just over half the unemployed fall below the 60% income poverty line outlined above. Even when unemployment levels are low—in terms of poverty—substantive issues remain in relation to:

- ◆ low wage levels;
- ◆ the restricted future faced by people in low-skilled and traditional/declining industries;
- ◆ people who don't appear in the unemployment figures but who are not in employment.

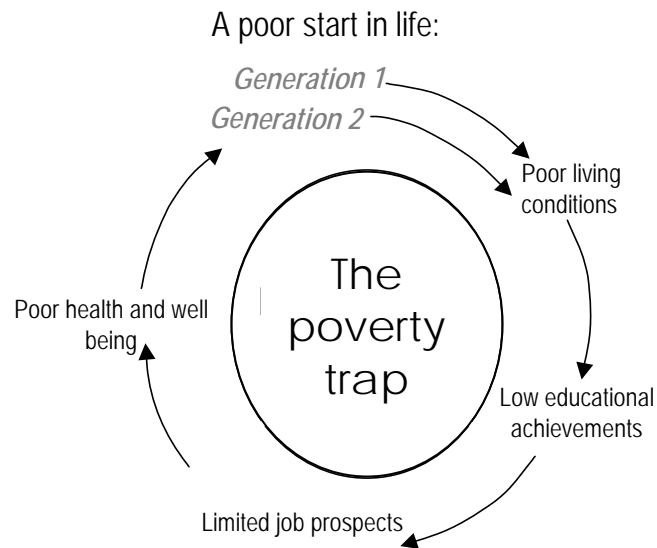
Education

The link between education and poverty and exclusion is also well stated. Put simply, people with lower levels of educational attainment are at a higher risk of:

- ◆ being out of work or being restricted to poorly-paid work
- ◆ not being able to negotiate in what is an increasingly complex world;
- ◆ not having the personal confidence or capacity to develop and maintain the social connections and interaction that lie at the heart of a good quality of life.

Health

Poor health and well-being are inextricably linked to poverty. They operate in an overall vicious cycle, which can be represented as follows:



Poor people experience ill-health more than others. They are more likely to be unemployed or occupied in low-quality employment; to have low levels of education; to live in unsanitary, damp or poor-quality accommodation and physical environments; and have restricted access to health services. They are more likely to smoke, have poor or inadequate diets and exercise less. Being poor makes it more difficult to access health care and it may reduce the opportunity or motivation to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Poverty, in turn, 'feeds off' ill-health. Thus, while poverty is one of the major determinants of health status, poor health is often an indicator and cause of poverty. In 2007, 48.6% of households headed by an ill or disabled person fell below the 60% poverty line. Many of those who experience serious illness and/or disability are unable to work and have to depend on welfare payments. The financial burden of their unemployment, as well as their medical and other related costs, can often affect the whole family and can contribute to inter-generational poverty. Their situation is worsened by insufficient financial resources, insufficient capacity to improve their circumstances, as well as insufficient and inaccessible services.

The issue of unpaid care responsibilities is of growing significance in the poverty debate. Not only does it reflect the poverty risk experienced by those receiving care but it also highlights the poverty risk of those providing care. People who provide unpaid care are often restricted themselves—not just in terms of their earning capacity—but also in terms of their ability to engage in wider social and cultural life.

HEALTH AND POVERTY... POVERTY AND HEALTH

Quality and Fairness, the National Health Strategy launched in 2001, makes it clear that poverty; unemployment; education; access to health services; housing and water quality all play important roles in determining people's health status. Among the points it makes are:

- ❖ there is a three-fold difference in age-standardised death rates between men in the lowest and in the highest socio-economic groupings.
- ❖ low weights at birth are more likely to occur in the unskilled, manual and unemployed socio-economic groups.
- ❖ perinatal (i.e. late pregnancy/early days of life) mortality is associated with socio-economic background.
- ❖ psychiatric admissions (an indicator of mental ill-health) are more likely to be seen in the lower socio-economic groups.
- ❖ health black spots are generally found in socially deprived areas.

Source: *Quality and Fairness*, 2001, pgs. 31-32

Housing and Accommodation

Housing quality is a major influence on people's living conditions. Housing, therefore, operates like health status in that it influences, and in turn is influenced by, poverty.

The most striking link between housing and poverty is probably that relating to homelessness. It is difficult to measure homelessness in Ireland. Every three years, the Government carries out a *Housing Needs Assessment* based on the number of people on waiting lists for social housing in each county and city council. 2,399 households were estimated to be homeless in 2005, down from 2,468 in 2002. Best estimates indicate

there are 5,000 people homeless in Ireland. The Homeless Agency carries out a survey of the number of homeless people in Dublin every three years. 2,366 adults were in homeless services in Dublin during the week of the *Counted In, 2008 survey*. Homeless people usually experience acute poverty. That means:

- ◆ not having proper shelter;
- ◆ not having enough food;
- ◆ having poor health status;
- ◆ often having addiction problems;
- ◆ not being able to avail of public services.

The poverty connection, however, goes well beyond the homeless issue alone. For many people who technically are not homeless, day-to-day housing concerns can include:

- ◆ poor quality housing with equally poor outside environments/settings;
- ◆ dampness;
- ◆ overcrowding;
- ◆ inadequate heating;
- ◆ high rents and mortgages.

ACTIVITY

Three households whose income is from social welfare payments

1. In Household A, the father is on Long-Term Unemployment Assistance, the mother is considered to be a qualified adult and there are four children, for whom Child Benefit is also paid.
2. In Household B, the mother is living on the One Parent Family Allowance and is in receipt of Child Benefit.
3. In Household C, the woman is in receipt of the (Non-Contributory) Old-Age Pension.

EXPENSES WORKSHEET³

Calculate the likely weekly expenditure of the respective households on the items listed below. Add in other items you consider necessary and calculate the likely expenditure.

Item Weekly	Expenditure
Rent or mortgage	
Loan repayments	
Leisure/entertainment	
Clothes	
TV rental/cable/licence	
ESB/fuel/gas/coal	
Newspapers	
Telephone	
Household goods	
House maintenance	
Footwear	
Insurance	
Food	
Travel, e.g. bus fares	
School-based expenses	
Total weekly expenditure	

³ The exercise is adapted from Bassett, M. and Haran N., *Left Outside?*, Dublin: Combat Poverty, 2006

Compare the expenditure with the household income using the information below.⁴

Scheme ⁵	Adult	Qualified Adult	Child
Unemployment Assistance (long-term)	€204.30	€135.60	€26.00
Lone Parent Scheme	€204.30		€26.00
Old-Age Pension (non contributory)	€219.00		

Child Benefit -Monthly Payment

€166.00 in respect of the first and second child.

€203.00 in respect of the third and subsequent children.

Childcare Supplement

€92 per month for children to age 5 ½

Households A and B would be entitled to Child Benefit. Household A would be eligible to apply for the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (Children Age 2-11 €200; 12-17 €305). Household C would be eligible for the Living Alone Allowance (€7.70) and also **may be** entitled to a 'household benefits package' which includes payments towards electricity or gas and telephone.

All the households **may** be eligible for Supplementary Welfare Allowance e.g. for those on long term social welfare payments e.g. Fuel Allowance paid for 30 weeks (rising to 32 weeks from April 2009) at €20 per week (plus €3.90 for smokeless fuel) , Rent Allowance or other allowances.

It is important for the user of the manual to source up-to-date information on these allowances. Additionally, if used in a group context participants could be encouraged to source information themselves from the Department of Social and Family Affairs as a follow-up to this exercise. Information is available on the Department website: www.welfare.ie.

⁴ Text updated and adapted from Left Outside? Bassett, M and Haran, N (2006)

⁵ Current social welfare rates (accessed www.welfare.ie: 18th March2009)

To involve colleagues in this exercise allocate one example household to small groups to work on together and have a discussion using the suggested questions outlined below.

Are you surprised by the comparison between income and expenses?

- ◆ How might these households cater for periodic expenses such as Christmas, birthdays and special family/religious occasions?
- ◆ Are these households living in poverty?
- ◆ How do you think you would feel if you were in these families' situation?

Vulnerable Groups

The key issues associated with groups who are particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion are considered below.

Children and Young People

Child poverty is a double-edged sword because not only does it affect children's quality of life today but constrains their life opportunities—and those of their children—later on. Poverty often passes from one generation to the next making it even more imperative to tackle it now and so secure the future of this generation of children, as well as the next.

Poverty for children means that they are excluded from doing things that are considered normal in society because of inadequate household income. Child poverty has a long-term effect. It makes a difference to children's health, educational achievement, life expectancy, physical and mental development, career prospects, as well as limiting their overall life opportunities. The impact of poverty on children can include bullying in school because of a pressure to fit in and inability to afford popular brand names. The longer a child is poor, the greater the deprivation he or she will suffer in later life. Children from poor households are much more likely to do poorly in school; to become teenage parents; to spend time in prison; and to have difficulty finding or keeping good jobs. (UNICEF, A League Table of Child Poverty in Rich Nations, June 2000).

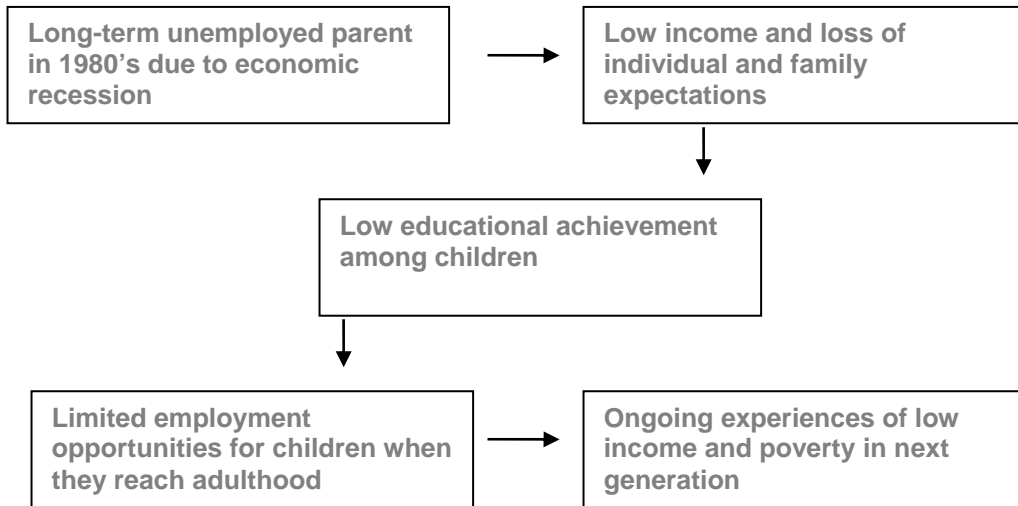
Children in lone-parent families are at a substantial risk of being in poverty. Ireland had just over 189,200 lone-parent families at the time of the 2006 Census. It should be noted that the more precise family coding allowed by

the revised relationship question used in the 2006 census has contributed to the increase from just over 130,000 lone-parent families recorded in 2002. The vast majority of the lone parents (86%) were women but, irrespective of gender, lone parents are likely to:

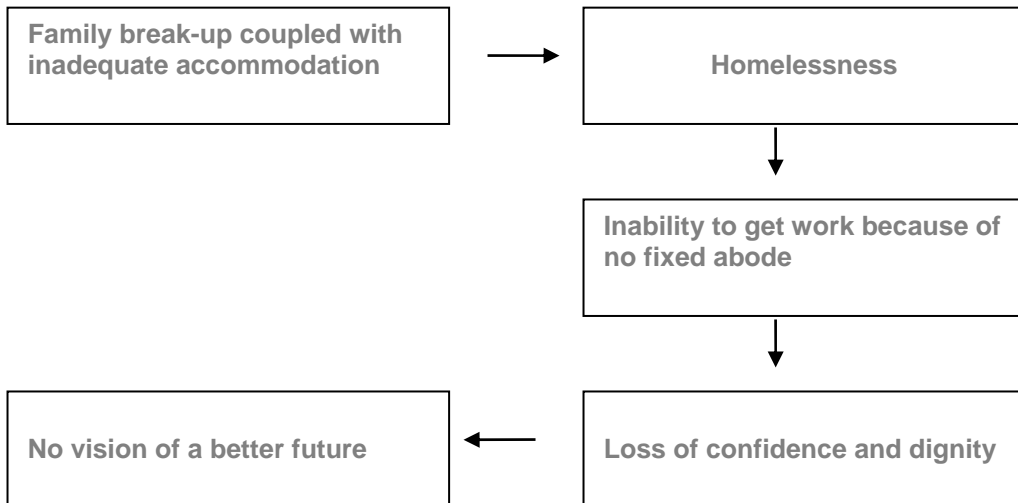
- ◆ be out of work or only able to work part time;
- ◆ account for three-quarters of those on council housing lists;
- ◆ have just a primary education.

It is useful to reflect on how cycles of poverty operate and what is needed to break or prevent such cycles, including consideration of what role local government can play in this regard; thinking of key programme areas such as housing, local and community development, recreation and amenities, education, health and welfare.

EXAMPLE 1 OF THE CYCLICAL AND/OR INTER-GENERATIONAL NATURE OF POVERTY



EXAMPLE 2 OF THE CYCLICAL AND/OR INTER-GENERATIONAL NATURE OF POVERTY



Women

Although Irish society continues to change dramatically, many traditional influences, attitudes and structures remain, particularly in terms of women's place and roles. Women tend to be at a higher risk of poverty than men because:

- ◆ they are still largely 'allocated' home-based household and caring responsibilities and therefore can't access paid work.
- ◆ they are more closely associated with lower level/lower paid jobs.
- ◆ many places of employment don't offer the flexibility that people with caring duties (who are, for the most part, women) require.
- ◆ the availability of childcare is still often restricted, thereby limiting women's work options.

Older People

For most people, old age is a time of falling income and diminishing family/social support yet increasing costs and increasing personal frailty. In 2007, 16.6% of the population were below the 60% income poverty line and 2% were in consistent poverty. For older people the particular difficulties associated with poverty include:

- ◆ housing maintenance costs;
- ◆ the affordability of home heating;
- ◆ potential costs of medication or personal care outgoings;
- ◆ loneliness and isolation leading to mental health problems and vice versa.

Travellers

Travellers tend to experience—at a very high level—most of the factors that are closely correlated with poverty. Chief among these are:

- ◇ poor levels of health and well-being. For example life expectancy at birth for Traveller women is 12 years less than it is for non-Traveller women and for Traveller men it is 10 years less than for non-Traveller men. Only 2.6% of Travellers live beyond 65 years of age;
- ◇ low educational achievement, which constrains their capacity to engage in economic and social life;
- ◇ cultural and lifestyle differences, which can lead to their exclusion from a range of services and facilities.

In 2006, Ireland had a Traveller population of 22,435 people. Two out of every five Travellers were aged less than 15 years in 2006 compared with one in five for the whole population. 15,195 of the 22,002 Travellers residing in private households in 2006 lived in permanent accommodation.

There is a lack of current data available on Travellers. A new study, the *All-Ireland Traveller Health Status Study*, is being undertaken to look at the health status and health needs of Travellers living on the island of Ireland. The findings from the study will provide a framework for policy development and practice in relation to Travellers. The study is due to be completed in 2010.

People With Disabilities

As with the other vulnerable groups, people with disabilities have one of the highest risks of being in poverty. Like those other groups there are a number of reasons why this is so. Among those reasons are:

- ◇ people with disabilities find it difficult to get involved in economic life;
- ◇ many employers cannot properly accommodate the needs of people with disabilities;
- ◇ people with disabilities can have personal living costs that are above average;
- ◇ despite the fact that disability covers a huge spectrum of conditions and varying degrees of severity, many non-disabled people assume that disability just means 'someone in a wheelchair.'

Migrants and Ethnic Minorities

The presence in Ireland of significant numbers of non-Irish nationals is a phenomenon that has emerged in the last decade. The correlations between migrant/minority groups and poverty are complex and varied. Among the important aspects are:

- ◆ many migrants/minorities don't experience income poverty because they hold good, well-paid jobs.
- ◆ others experience poverty because they are not legally permitted to work in Ireland.
- ◆ many others are involved in low-paid, low-skilled jobs involving unsocial hours and poor working terms and conditions.
- ◆ exclusion from participation in mainstream living—because of language/communication problems, low levels of confidence, cultural differences and/or discrimination—can be very significant.
- ◆ there is no such thing as “the migrant/minority community or population” but rather a whole series of very different communities and populations.

The 2006 Census showed that 10% of the usually resident population that indicated a nationality was non-Irish. Non-Irish nationals resident in Ireland increased from 224,000 in 2002 to 420,000 in 2006.

Urban Poverty and Rural Disadvantage

A key difference between poverty in urban and rural settings is that urban poverty tends to be more geographically concentrated while rural poverty tends to be more dispersed. Urban poverty, therefore, can be very obvious while rural poverty, because it can exist side by side with considerable wealth and affluence, is frequently hidden and unnoticed. Other differences include:

- ◆ urban poverty is often strongly associated with local council housing.
- ◆ urban poverty is also often associated with cumulative disadvantage including problems of social disorder and poor environments.

- ◇ some, though not all, rural poverty relates to the agricultural economy, which can be very cyclical.
- ◇ issues such as isolation, accessibility and lack of services are usually central to rural poverty.

Currently some 60.7% of Ireland's population lives in an urban area, i.e. towns of 1,500 people or more.

Access to Services

It is one of life's paradoxes that those who most need quality public services, frequently have to make do with poorer quality services and have most difficulty accessing those services. The basic accessibility of services tends to be governed by a range of issues, including:

- ◇ their physical location;
- ◇ their opening hours;
- ◇ people's knowledge/understanding of them;
- ◇ the image they present to people;
- ◇ how they interact with and treat people;
- ◇ people's confidence in terms of engaging with them;
- ◇ the actual relevance of the services to the people they are supposedly aimed at.

Exclusion from basic, core services can accentuate poverty and prevent people from escaping from it. It is in this very area that councils have the greatest potential to make real differences to the lives of excluded and marginalised people. By using outreach-based approaches; by being more user friendly; by trying to see how things look from 'the other side of the counter'; and by making it easier for people to know and understand the system, councils can make those differences. In many cases, they can achieve that at a minimal cost.

ACTIVITY

Reasons for and Consequences of Poverty

Lack of quality child care	Inadequate expenditure on public services	Tax system disproportionately favours those outside of poverty
Ill health or disability	Laziness – not prepared to put in the effort	Literacy and language barriers
Inadequate government action to combat poverty and inequality in Ireland	Capitalism	Discrimination against particular social classes and groupings in public services and employment
Poverty traps that make moving from welfare to employment difficult, e.g. low paid workers paying a relatively high level of tax and/or loss of benefits on taking up employment	One-size-fits-all approach to education, e.g. mismatch between education and diverse needs, interests, capacities and cultural backgrounds	Lack of employment opportunities in rural areas
Racism	Low confidence and self-esteem	Lack of educational qualifications necessary for employment
Inadequate social welfare allowances to those living in poverty	Unequal distribution of wealth and power	Lack of accessible transport

1. Consider the reasons outlined above and note those you most agree with.
2. If possible distinguish between causes and consequences, e.g. low confidence as a consequence of poverty and also how some of the consequences can also contribute to poverty, e.g. lack of educational qualifications.
3. Finally, identify how many of the causes that you think are amenable to redress at local government level.

Group exercise

This could be used to engage colleagues in a discussion on the structural causes of poverty as follows:

Copy the sheet onto individually-cut cards and include some blank cards.

- ◆ Divide participants into small groups and allocate a set of cards to each group
- ◆ Ask them to divide into causes, consequences or unsure piles
- ◆ Ask them also to identify their three most fundamental causes
- ◆ Take feedback and look for similarities and differences
- ◆ Check if any causes appear across all groups or if any do not appear at all
- ◆ Encourage participants to go beyond 'surface' explanations, e.g. instead of simply stating reasons such as lack of transport or childcare, they should explain why this is the case
- ◆ Ask participants to identify how many of the causes are amenable to redress at local government level

FROM POVERTY TO SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The notion of social exclusion widens the poverty debate. It recognises that many people find day-to-day life difficult, not just because of the absence of money or resources. Social exclusion is the term used to describe the 'condition' of not being able to fully participate in society and not being able to enjoy the good things in life. That is very clearly the territory that is touched on in the NAPS definition of poverty. Although social exclusion is often due to people's lack of money or resources, it is also due to other influences. These can include:

- ◆ direct discrimination against particular groups or categories of people;
- ◆ physical barriers such as a lack of transport or the absence of services/facilities in areas/communities;
- ◆ people not having the confidence to step forward and participate in society and partake of what it offers;
- ◆ people lacking the skills/qualifications that may be needed for social and economic participation;
- ◆ organisations that work on the basis of 'one size fits all' and are not geared to the particular needs of people with specific problems.

Many people now believe that the concept of social exclusion broadens understanding of poverty, its causes and consequences. Rather than being a set condition that people are 'in', social exclusion is a set of processes that push people out to the edge of society and distance them further and further from the chance of having a job or an adequate income; from social and educational opportunities; from social and community networks; and from power and decision-making.

COMBAT POVERTY'S VIEW

There are different types of poverty. Lack of money or limited income is common to any definition of poverty. When one thinks of poverty one may think of people who are starving or living without proper housing, clothing or medical care—people who struggle to stay alive. This is known as absolute poverty. Some people in Ireland, including homeless people, may experience this type of poverty.

Poverty is not the same everywhere. It varies because each society's standard of living is different. Poverty also varies over time as living standards change. The income level that might have indicated poverty 10 years ago is not the same income level today due to higher living standards. While people may have more money than they had 10 years ago their position compared to average incomes in society may have deteriorated. If the incomes of the rest of society increase more than the incomes of people in poverty, people's relative poverty will have worsened.

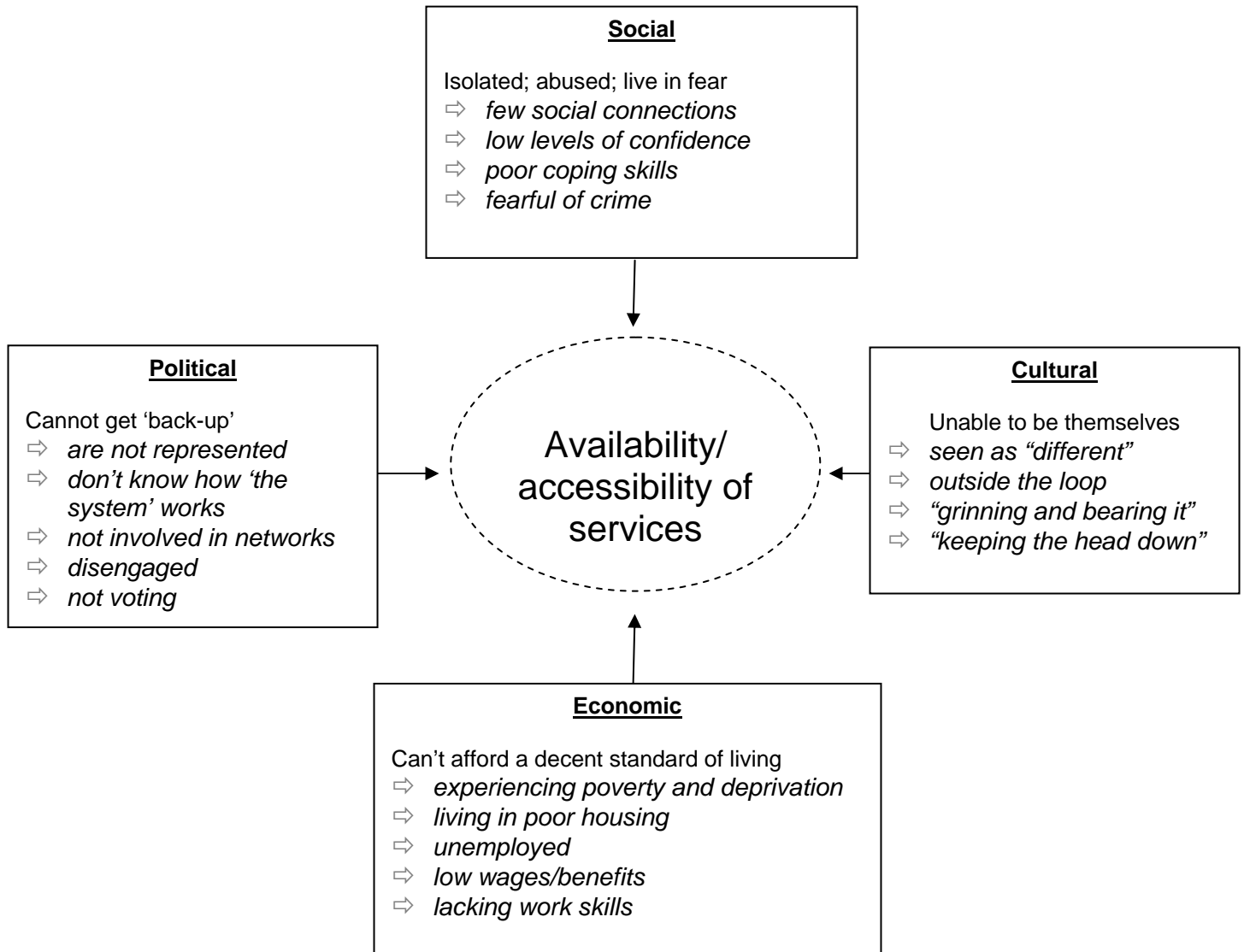
Poverty is not inevitable. Poverty is an outcome of the way society allocates resources such as money, wealth, jobs, education, housing, health care and so on. The political system, labour market, social welfare system and taxation system all influence the allocation of resources in society. There are other factors, many of which are inter-related, that influence the likelihood of being in poverty. They include:

- ❖ whether one has a job or not and the type of job
- ❖ size and type of family, e.g. one-parent, couple, couple with children etc.
- ❖ age
- ❖ people's social circumstances or social class
- ❖ gender
- ❖ disability
- ❖ educational experience
- ❖ ill-health
- ❖ whether people own/rent a home
- ❖ experience of discrimination
- ❖ sexual orientation.

Poverty stops some people from participating as equals in everyday life, from feeling part of their community and from developing their skills and talents. This process is often called social exclusion.

One model or framework that helps us understand some of the factors that drive social exclusion is presented below:

Social Exclusion: A Framework for Understanding





ACTIVITY

- Consider this framework which includes many of the consequences of social exclusion and add any other consequences that are not identified.
- Then reflect on the policies and processes that have led to these consequences, e.g. in the political sphere, there are many system-level barriers to participation for those experiencing poverty, including:
 - power holders can invite certain people to participate;
 - there is a specific ethos and style of ‘doing political business’
 - access to information in appropriate format, cost and time involved in participating and support for family roles.
- This activity could also be used in a group context by removing the text and asking small groups to fill in the framework with what they consider to be the consequences of social exclusion for individuals and system-level drivers of this exclusion along the lines suggested above

THE RELEVANCE OF POVERTY/EXCLUSION TO COUNCILS ... AND OF COUNCILS TO POVERTY/EXCLUSION

Since the publication of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in 1997 it has been accepted that local authorities must be central to how poverty and exclusion are addressed in Ireland. This is built into the *Local Government Act 2001*, which identifies promoting social inclusion as a core role that should be reflected in local government activities. Strategies at local government level are expected to underpin and strengthen actions being undertaken at national level.

When we take the time to look at it, we can quickly identify a number of connections between the work done by councils and how it can impact on poverty/exclusion at local level. Local government has one of the longest and most honourable traditions in Ireland in terms of addressing poverty and exclusion. Social housing alone – which was and is provided for people for whom the private housing market doesn't work – has made a huge impact over many decades in bettering the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Virtually every council service has a direct or indirect effect on poverty and social exclusion and how people experience them. Below, a sense can be gained of the impact that can be made under each of the eight local authority programme groups.

ACTIVITY

Programme Groups and Their Impact on Poverty/Exclusion

PROGRAMME GROUPS

IMPACTS

1 Housing and Building

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| ⇒ local authority housing | ➤ improved quality of life |
| ⇒ grants | ➤ better health status |
| ⇒ estate management | ➤ development of individuals and communities |
| ⇒ Traveller accommodation | ➤ people's ability to pay is factored in |

2 Roads and Safety

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| ⇒ roads | ➤ improved accessibility of resources and facilities |
| ⇒ footpaths | ➤ improved safety and fewer accidents |
| ⇒ street lighting | ➤ reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour |
| ⇒ parking | ➤ increased local interaction and reduced isolation |
| ⇒ signage | |

3 Water Supply and Sewerage

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| ⇒ water | ➤ maintenance and improvement of health status |
| ⇒ sewerage | |
| ⇒ public toilets | |

4 Development

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| ⇒ planning | ➤ fairer distribution of resources and assets |
| ⇒ building control | ➤ protection of amenities for all |
| ⇒ promotion of development | ➤ improved access and accessibility |
| | ➤ more and better jobs |
| | ➤ safer environments |
-

-
- people's ability to pay is factored in

5 Environmental Protection

- ⇒ waste management
- ⇒ pollution control
- ⇒ fire protection
- ⇒ safety of structures and places
- improved physical appearance
- better quality local environments
- improved safety, fewer injuries and accidents
- improved health status
- people's ability to pay is factored in

6 Recreation and Amenity

- ⇒ swimming pools
- ⇒ parks and open spaces
- ⇒ libraries
- ⇒ recreation centres
- improved health status
- better quality of life
- fostering networking and community links
- opportunities for learning/education/training
- people's ability to pay is factored in

7 Agriculture; Education; Health; and Welfare

- ⇒ VEC contributions
- ⇒ Higher Education Grants
- improved educational attainment
- people's ability to pay factored in

8 Miscellaneous

- ⇒ elections
- ⇒ consumer protection
- greater control by people of their own lives and the decisions that affect them
- protection of the potentially weak and vulnerable

Reflecting on Potential impacts of Local Authority Programmes

The material on pages 39 and 40 could be used to stimulate discussion with colleagues on the potential impacts of existing programme areas on poverty and social exclusion

Cover or Remove the text which names the potential impacts and ask participants, in small groups, to insert their ideas. This can be done on flip chart sheets for feedback purposes.

Councils can also have a significant impact on poverty and exclusion simply by being more aware of the circumstances and needs of their service users. Some examples of this include:

- ⇒ treating all service users with respect;
- ⇒ recognising that one in four adults in Ireland has literacy difficulties and taking this into account when the council communicates with its public;
- ⇒ being aware of the cultural nuances that are important for groups such as Travellers and ethnic minorities;
- ⇒ arranging opening hours to better suit service users, particularly those on the social and economic margins;
- ⇒ looking closely at accessibility issues and providing more services on an outreach basis.

Very often, by changing things on the margins, at little or no cost, or by paying close heed to the way it conducts its business, a council can have the greatest impact on poverty and exclusion.



CASE STUDY

Dublin: Understanding Social Inclusion

Dublin City Council (DCC) produced a **staff handbook** to identify and understand social inclusion.

The handbook has three main aims:

- ❖ to raise awareness of poverty and social inclusion;
- ❖ to provide staff with information and contacts;
- ❖ to show staff what is being done to tackle social inclusion.

What does the handbook include?

- ❖ information about social inclusion issues and initiatives in the local authority area;
- ❖ DCC Executive Managers' views of their areas' contribution to social inclusion;
- ❖ explanations of social inclusion terminology;
- ❖ photographs from an in-house competition on social inclusion.

How was the handbook put together?

- ❖ It was formatted in a user-friendly way in plain English with large font and is spiral bound.

Where was the handbook distributed?

- ❖ to the Dublin City Council's 6,500 staff through the internal mail system;
- ❖ all new DCC staff will receive the handbook in their induction pack.

What has the handbook achieved?

- ❖ increased awareness of social inclusion within the DCC area;
- ❖ an assurance to DCC staff involved in producing the book that the local authority has impact on social inclusion.

The handbook acts as a declaration that social inclusion is a core part of the work of the Dublin City Council.

CASE STUDY

Laois: Best practice for socially inclusive services

We will provide leadership, develop, promote, protect and regulate our County and deliver quality public services so as to enhance the quality of life for the community.

-Mission Statement, Laois County Council Customer Charter

As part of their Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, Laois County Council (LCC) carried out an **action research programme** entitled 'Bridging the Gap.' The project was developed to address the impact of services on socially excluded groups in Laois.

The **action research programme** and resulting **Customer Charter** aimed:

- ❖ to highlight the delivery of existing services and their results on different groups;
- ❖ to make customers aware of their rights and existing services;
- ❖ to improve awareness and accessibility to existing services;
- ❖ to help LCC staff become more aware of the specific needs of particular groups.

The **action research programme** found that people in vulnerable groups:

1. had difficulties accessing information about services available to them;
2. felt they were not treated the same as other groups with regard to consultation about services;
3. were unaware of the responsibilities and concerns of the LCC.

The 'Bridging the Gap' initiative led to the LCC producing a written commitment called the **Customer Charter**.

The implementation team of the charter had a representative from each section of the Laois County Council. This team is responsible for carrying out the section-specific commitments set out in the charter.

A copy of the Customer Charter, launched in 2005, was given to all LCC staff members. It is also available online at <http://www.laois.ie/media/Media,732,en.pdf>.

The existence of the Customer Charter has improved the efficiency of frontline services and has made people in the local authority's area more aware of services offered by the LCC.

3

Responding to the Context: What's Already Being Done

INTRODUCTION

In the previous section we looked at what poverty is and how it is manifest in Ireland. In this section we aim to present an overview of what is being done at the strategic level in response to the realities of poverty in Ireland.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS TO ADDRESS POVERTY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION INCLUDE:

- Strengthening the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) and extending the plans to local level
- The pursuit of social inclusion as a core objective of the National Development Plan
- The expansion of the Social Inclusion Unit programme
- The priority given to the work of social inclusion measures (SIMs) groups, including implementation at local level of the commitments contained in the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*.

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION (NAPinclusion) 2007-2013

The first National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) came into effect in 1997. It recognised that:

- ◇ eliminating poverty would be a difficult task;
- ◇ to eliminate poverty, one would first need to analyse and understand the problems associated with it;

- ◆ to resolve those problems one would then need to adopt a range of integrated and targeted approaches.

In 2000, European Union (EU) leaders established the Social Inclusion Process to make a decisive impact on eradicating poverty by 2010. As part of this process, EU Member States agreed to submit two-year National Action Plans. These plans outline the goals that Member States have set for themselves in contributing to the EU objective of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. In Ireland, the National Anti Poverty Strategy and the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion have been synchronised since 2003.

The following key challenges in combating poverty and social exclusion have been identified at EU level:

- tackling child poverty and breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty;
- making the labour markets truly inclusive;
- ensuring decent housing for everyone;
- overcoming discrimination and increasing the integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities;
- tackling financial inclusion and over-indebtedness.

The most recent *National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008 – 2010* outlines Ireland's response to these challenges:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2008/nap/irelanden.pdf

The lead role which local government must play in the development of local responses to national policy goals has been recognised at the national policy level since the publication of the revised National Anti Poverty Strategy: *Building*

an Inclusive Society in 2002. This is strengthened in the current national policy framework.

The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* (NAPinclusion) was published in February 2007. There is much consistency between this plan, the current social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* (T16) and the National Development Plan: *Transforming Ireland 2007–2013*.

The life cycle approach, which seeks to support policies that meet the needs of people at different stages of their lives, is characteristic of all of these documents. NAPinclusion contains an overall goal, high-level goals and 'actions'.

The overall goal of the strategy is: 'To reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2 and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition'.

The NAPinclusion contains 12 goals for poverty reduction. They apply to children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities and communities.

Goals aimed at enabling children to reach their full potential:

Goal 1: Education

Ensure that targeted, pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Action Plan (DEIS).

Goal 2: Education

Reduce the number of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to reduce the proportion from the current 27–30% to less than 15% by 2016.

Goal 3: Education

Work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20–24 completing upper second-level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013.

Goal 4: Income Support

Maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33–35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate over the period of this plan and review child income supports aimed at assisting children in families on low income.

Goals aimed at increasing employment and participation in society among people of working age, including people with disabilities:**Goal 5: Employment and Participation**

Introduce an active case management approach that will support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment. The target is to support 50,000 such people, including lone parents and the long-term unemployed, with an overall aim of reducing the number of those whose total income is derived from long-term social welfare payments by 20% by 2016. This target will be reviewed in light of experience and further learning.

Goal 6: Income Support

Maintain the relative value of the lowest social welfare rate at €204.30 in 2007 terms, over the course of this plan, subject to available resources.

Goals aimed at enabling older people to maintain an adequate standard of living:

Goal 7: Community Care

Continue to increase investment in community care services for older people, including home care packages and advanced day care services, to support them to live independently in the community for as long as possible.

Goal 8: Income Support

Increase the basic state pension to at least €230 per week by 2012.

This commitment comes from the June 2007 Programme for Government, which supersedes the original government commitment on pensions in the NAPinclusion.

Goals aimed at building sustainable communities and improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged communities:

Many of the policy responses required to meet these goals involve the coordination of policies in a number of areas, as well as targeting people across the life cycle.

Goal 10: Housing

Deliver high-quality housing for those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs and underpin the building of sustainable communities. An important element will be the enhanced housing output reflected in *Towards 2016*, which will result in the accommodation needs of some 60,000 new households being addressed over the period 2007 to 2009.

This will include special housing needs for the homeless, Travellers, older people and people with disabilities.

Goal 11: Health

Develop 500 primary care teams by 2011, which will improve access to services in the community, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of holders of medical cards.

Goal 12: Integration of Migrants

Develop a strategy aimed at achieving the integration of newcomers into Irish society. As an initial action, resources for the provision of 550 teachers for language schools in the education sector will be provided by 2009 and access to other public services through translation of information and supports will be improved.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP) 2006 - 2013

Framed as a result of an extensive consultation process, the National Development Plan outlines what needs to be done to respond to the economic and social development needs of the country. It ranges right across the social and economic spectra and also pays significant attention to issues such as infrastructure, education/training, and balanced regional development. Many people believe the NDP is just about major physical infrastructure projects. But there is much more to it than that.

Seven key objectives underpin the plan:

- ◇ decisively tackling structural infrastructure deficits;
- ◇ enhancing enterprise development, science, technology and innovation, working age training and skills provision;
- ◇ fostering balanced regional development;
- ◇ investing in long-term environmental sustainability;
- ◇ strengthened all-island collaboration in areas of mutual interest;
- ◇ delivery of a multi-faceted programme for social inclusion;
- ◇ provide value for taxpayer's money.

The goals set down in the NAPinclusion are also reiterated in the NDP.

Social inclusion goals based on the integrated national policy framework are outlined in Chapter 11 of the NDP. The plan states that

Delivery of these priority goals for social inclusion will be achieved by strengthening administration through greater coordination and integration of procedures across Government at national and local levels, as well as between these levels.⁶

Specific commitments to enhance social inclusion which are relevant to the role of local government include:

- the County/City Development Board (CDB) structure will be developed and strengthened to support its role in coordinating public service delivery (including social inclusion activities) at local level. In this context, the extension of Social Inclusion Units to 50% of the city and county councils by end 2008 will support this approach;
- a continuing focus, at national and local level, on coordinated delivery of services and supports to improve outcomes for the Traveller Community.
- the delivery of the RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development) programme, which aims to direct state assistance towards improving quality of life and access to opportunities for communities in the most disadvantaged urban areas, will be strengthened and enhanced.
- the development of new mechanisms, at national and local level, to improve coordination and delivery of housing and care services for older people and people with disabilities.

Towards 2016

Towards 2016 is the seventh in a series of national partnership agreements that have been in place in Ireland since the late 1980s. Many people are under the impression that *Towards 2016* is concerned only with pay issues. However, while pay may form a central principle in the partnership agreement, it is not the only issue dealt with. Plus, the partnership process does not just involve employers and employees. The central part played by the Community Pillar, for example, has meant that the views of marginalised sectors and communities have been built in also.

⁶ *National Development Plan 2006-2013*, pg. 237

Towards 2016 plays a pivotal role in helping address poverty and social exclusion in Ireland.

Key areas of work addressed in the agreement include:

- ◇ child poverty;
- ◇ increasing the number of housing units available while building sustainable communities;
- ◇ minimum standards regulations for the private rented sector;
- ◇ pension/income supports for older people;
- ◇ improved access to quality services, including health care and child care;
- ◇ education and training.

Specific social inclusion related commitments in the agreement which are particularly relevant to local government include:

- ◇ developing and strengthening the CDB structure to ensure that it can operate effectively as a vehicle for supporting a more integrated approach to service delivery at local level;
- ◇ expansion of the local authority social inclusion programme. More than half of local authorities now have a social inclusion unit;
- ◇ appropriately resourcing the community and voluntary sector's participation in local social partnership structures;
- ◇ prioritisation of the work of Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) groups, to improve coordination of social inclusion activities at local level;
- ◇ improving the availability of appropriate data at local level to assist in setting indicator and evaluating progress towards the achievement of the outcomes contained in this 10-year framework agreement.

COUNTY/CITY DEVELOPMENT BOARDS AND STRATEGIES

Coordination of services at point of delivery to citizens is a challenge for public services everywhere. In Ireland a large number of separate groups and specialist agencies deal with matters such as industrial development; local development; physical planning; education; health; social services; agriculture; environment; tourism; fisheries; and other sectors. These all report more or less directly or 'vertically' to their parent departments. Ensuring a 'horizontally' integrated delivery of service by these bodies at local level is not easy. Coordination with other interests – business, local development groups and local communities – is difficult also. The challenge of local service integration at county and city level has been met by the establishment of a County/City Development Board (CDB) in each county and city local authority. The CDBs bring together representatives of local government, local development, the relevant state agencies active at local level and the social partners (including the community and voluntary sector). They are chaired by the chairperson of the local authority and serviced by the director of community and enterprise – a senior local authority staff member.

To achieve their objective of integration, a primary task of the CDBs has been to prepare and oversee the implementation of new County/City Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development. These are broad-based strategies covering all major services and are the result of an intensive research and consultation process in each county/city.

The strategies have a 10-year time scale and typically they set out:

- ◆ an overall vision for the county/city;
- ◆ agreed overall objectives;
- ◆ targets and indicators, usually for the first three to five years;
- ◆ the agencies that are responsible for specific objectives and targets, and an indication of their roles.

Each CDB also has a Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Working Group that develops and coordinates activities in this area.

Ultimately, the process will be one that provides:

- ◆ a greater sense of ownership and commitment at all levels;
- ◆ re-invigorated local governance;
- ◆ better local integration of the broad range of public services;
- ◆ a better quality of life for citizens.

RAPID AND CLAR

Also at the local level, area-based initiatives such as RAPID and CLAR are in place. RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development) brings together a local partnership team to assess needs in relation to social exclusion in designated urban areas. Plans to address those needs – typically in the areas of unemployment; childcare; community facilities; addictions; housing; health; education; and community safety – are then put in place. Money to implement the plans is sourced from the National Development Plan. CLAR is a rural initiative that supports the provision of basic infrastructure, e.g. water supply, in designated areas.

EQUAL STATUS LEGISLATION

The *Equal Status Acts 2000 and 2004* are another part of public policy that has a direct impact on many poverty/exclusion issues.

The Act promotes equality and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender; marital status; family status; sexual orientation; religion; age; disability; race; and/or being a Traveller. Thus the Act fits together neatly with many of the priorities raised in Section 2.

COUNCILS' CORPORATE PLANS

The *Local Government Act 2001* requires county and city councils to prepare a five-year council corporate plan within six months of local government elections. That plan has to provide a clear sense of what the council wants to achieve over the next five years. It must also show how and why the council has taken the particular strategic positions it has outlined in its plan.

The *Local Government Act* also identifies social inclusion as a core issue that should be reflected in local government activities. That means social inclusion has to be embedded as an integral part of the corporate plan. In its guidelines on preparing corporate plans, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government spells out how it expects social inclusion strategies to be implemented across councils' subsidiary operational plans. Social inclusion is to be tangible rather than just aspirational.

Finally, the new corporate plans are expected to reflect the spirit as well as the letter of social inclusion. That means they have to be drawn up in an inclusive way, relying heavily on consultation and participation. By adopting such approaches, councils will ensure that social inclusion becomes embedded in what they do and how they do things.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS

A range of institutional structures are in place to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NAPinclusion.

These include:

Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)

Established in 2002, the OSI is based in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. It has overall responsibility for developing, co-coordinating and driving the NAPinclusion process. It is responsible for enhancing the poverty assessment process, development of a data strategy to support the process and for research and communications strategies.

The Combat Poverty Agency

The Agency has a statutory role to advise the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on all aspects of poverty and works closely with the OSI to this end. In 2009, the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty

Agency will be integrated within the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development

It is chaired by An Taoiseach and comprises the Tánaiste and relevant Ministers. The Local Development and Drugs Strategy Unit in the Department regularly reports to the Cabinet Committee, through the Minister of State, on the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy and RAPID programmes.

Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion

It is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and supports the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion.

The Management Group of Assistant Secretaries

This group comprises senior officials from the relevant government departments. It oversees the work of the OSI.

Social Inclusion Consultative Group

This is co-chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Social Inclusion Forum

This is an annual event which gives those not directly involved with the social partnership process an opportunity to input their views and experiences on the implementation of NAPinclusion. It is convened by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF).

Social Inclusion Units

These units were established in key government departments to coordinate their departments' contribution to the NAPinclusion

Social inclusion liaison officers

These officers were appointed within departments to communicate and coordinate on social inclusion issues.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ANTI-POVERTY LEARNING NETWORK (LGAPLN)

The LGAPLN is run by the Institute for Public Administration. The network brings together local government staff and elected members to:

- ◆ share good practice, from within Ireland and beyond;
- ◆ discuss and develop poverty- and exclusion-related issues;
- ◆ take part in training.

MY ACTION PLAN

This section has tried to provide a detailed overview of what is being done nationally to address poverty. It cannot, of course, be comprehensive in the breadth or depth of its coverage. The checklist below can help you plan what more you need or want to do to broaden your knowledge and/or contacts base.

STRATEGY/ ORGANISATION	Read the documentation	Make personal contact	Provide feedback to my authority	Reshape my work/service accordingly
<i>NAP inclusion</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>National Development Plan</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Sustaining Progress</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>County/City Development Boards and Strategies</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>RAPID and CLAR</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Combat Poverty/OSI</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

CASE STUDY

Cavan Lone Parents Initiative: Best practice on social inclusion within local authorities

In 2006, Cavan County Development Board (CDB) established an innovative interagency project entitled the **Cavan Lone Parents Initiative (CLPI)**. It is comprised of:

- ❖ members of the CDB
- ❖ lone parents' networks
- ❖ other community groups

The initiative aimed to:

- ❖ identify the needs of the relatively hidden group of lone parents in Cavan;
- ❖ address poverty and social exclusion experienced by the same group.

In early 2007, the CLPI started a **research project** using 21 newly-trained, lone parent participants as data collectors. The data collectors used surveys and focus group interviews to find out about the education and training needs of people parenting alone in Cavan. Positive outcomes of the research project included:

- ❖ the mainstream training of the 21 lone parents;
- ❖ identifying and locating lone parents throughout Cavan;
- ❖ CLPI's range of training courses set up across the county.

Service delivery to people parenting alone has improved in a number of areas because of the initiative:

1. Inclusion in the labour market: identification of lone parents who wish to work has meant the CDB can target them directly to offer supports, such as guidance counselling and community development support;
2. Education and training options: a raised demand by lone parents led to new courses being provided throughout Cavan;
3. Social inclusion: those on training were paid child support and travel allowance, greatly facilitating participation.

As of March 2008, the initiative was seeing high levels of engagement. There were 136 training placements, with five lone parents progressing to the FÁS Community Employment Programme and six other participants were employed.

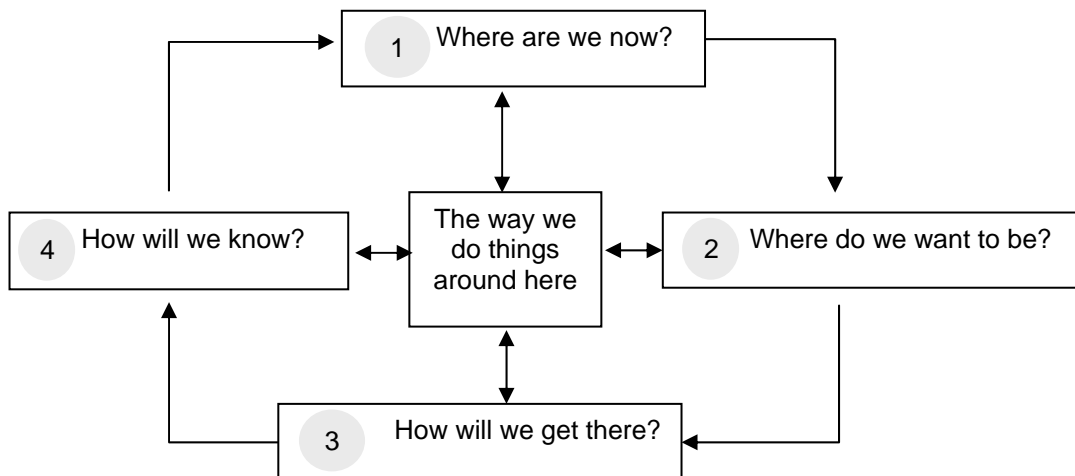
By creating the CLPI, the CDB was allowed to identify and locate lone parents, find out their needs and provide them with appropriate supports and services.

4

How We Stand Locally: Data Collection and Analysis

INTRODUCTION

So far this manual has concentrated on the bigger picture in terms of poverty. It has looked at poverty in a strategic way, trying to provide a sense of what it means to people and what its causes are. It has also looked at how it is being addressed as a national issue. The purpose of this manual is to leave local authorities better placed to tackle poverty in their own settings. In this section some thought is given to how local authorities might find out what their own local poverty position is. The point of doing this is to help provide answers/responses to Step No. 1 in the classic strategic planning cycle:



DEFINING A BASELINE: THE POVERTY PROFILE

It is essential to have a sense of what the local poverty situation actually is or was and not what one might suppose it to be. The direction, focus and content of anti-poverty work cannot be based on hunch or intuition. It must be based on robust analysis of information. However, that information ideally should combine both 'hard' and 'soft' aspects. A poverty profile is what emerges when all the information is pulled together. More detailed guidance on developing a poverty profile is available in the Combat

Poverty Agency's *Guide to Developing a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy (LAPSIS)*. Therefore, this section takes just a brief look at developing a poverty profile.

What is the Poverty profile in your local authority area?

If a poverty profile has not yet been carried out, try to estimate, on your own or with colleagues, the following:

- % and numbers of people affected by relative poverty and consistent poverty
- groups most affected and proportion of these groups affected under the relative and consistent headings
- geographical spread/ concentration;
- levels of early school leaving
- levels of unemployment
- levels of homelessness
- numbers on social housing list

When a Poverty Profile is carried out (or revisited if already done) check the estimates with the actual picture. Focus reflection and discussion on: any surprises; implications for work of the local authority

A more interactive method which can be used to impart facts is to use data from the Poverty Profile either as a quiz or in the form of 'true or false' exercise; you can make it more interesting by including some inaccurate data. It is important to devise the method and process in a way that does not make people feel they have failed if they get it wrong e.g. ask participants to work in small groups.

The main source of 'hard' information for a poverty profile is a Census.. The most recent Census figures available describe Ireland as it was in 2006. The fact that it is somewhat out of date is a drawback. It also does not ask questions about one very basic aspect of poverty--people's incomes.

Other relevant data that should be used includes:

- datasets held by local authorities, such as those on social housing, tenant profiles, distribution and use of services etc.
- administrative data from Government departments and state agencies including the Department of Social and Family Affairs (welfare payments/recipients at local offices), the Department of Education and Science (data on school-based schemes and resources)
- data held by local state bodies and agencies such as the Vocational Education Committee (VEC), FÁS and the Health Service Executive (HSE) and local Non-Government Organisations.

WHAT HELP CAN THE CENSUS GIVE US?

The simple answer is: Lots! The results of the 2006 Census are available in 17 published reports as follows:

Preliminary Report

Principal Demographic Results

Volume 1 - Population Classified by Area

Volume 2 - Ages and Marital Status

Volume 3 - Household Composition, Family Units and Fertility

Principal Socio-economic Results

Volume 4 - Usual Residence, Migration, Birthplaces and Nationalities

Volume 5 - Ethnic or Cultural Background (including the Irish Traveller Community)

Volume 6 - Housing

Volume 7 - Principal Economic Status and Industries

Volume 8 - Occupations

Volume 9 - Irish Language

Volume 10 - Education and Qualifications

Volume 11 - Disability, Carers and Voluntary Activities

Volume 12 - Travel to Work, School and College

Volume 13 - Religion

Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland

(The reports are available at www.cso.ie/census).

Most of the information in these reports is provided at city or county council level. It is possible to go below the local government level. The Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) facility can provide over 1,100 Census variables broken down to Electoral Division (ED) level and for all towns of 1,000 people or more. There are officially 3,440 EDs in Ireland but one covers the Louth-Meath border so is split into two and another 32 have low populations so are merged into neighbouring EDs to ensure confidentiality. 3,409 EDs are available in the SAPS. Interactive tables that allow people to draw out specific Census findings are also available at www.cso.ie.

Pobal have made the *New Measures of Deprivation for the Republic of Ireland* publically available on its website (www.pobal.ie). The data provides an up-to-date analysis of the changes in deprivation in each local area over the fifteen years from 1991 to 2006 (that is four census periods).

Finally, GAMMA, a database analysis company, is involved with Pobal in producing local area-based Census reports. There is likely to be a charge in this service but currently it means councils can get tailor-made poverty profiles. GAMMA can be contacted by email at info@gamma.ie.

MAKING SENSE OF THE CENSUS

Because of the volume of information it contains, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the Census data. When it is used to draw up a poverty profile, one needs to be selective about what one takes from it. One way to

be selective is to focus on groups who are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion (see Section 2). The Census provides a range of facts, figures and indicators that will show how a county or city stands in terms of the key poverty/exclusion issues. If that approach is taken, then the headings (and the Census sources) that could be used within a poverty profile are:

- ◆ Employment (Census Volumes 7 & 8)
- ◆ Education (Census Volume 10)
- ◆ Health (Census Volume 11)
- ◆ Housing and Accommodation (Census Volume 6)
- ◆ Children and Young People (All Volumes)
- ◆ Women (All Volumes)
- ◆ Older People (All Volumes)
- ◆ Travellers (Census Volume 5)
- ◆ People with Disabilities (Census Volume 11)
- ◆ Migrants/Ethnic Minorities (Census Volumes 4, 5 & Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland Volume)
- ◆ Urban Poverty (All Volumes)
- ◆ Rural Disadvantage (All Volumes)
- ◆ Access to Services (Principal Socio-Economic Results Volume)

CASE STUDY

In developing its Local Anti-Poverty Strategy (LAPS), **Donegal County Council** invested significant effort in developing a **Poverty Profile** of the county.

Using Census and other information and consultation feedback from within the council, a profile was drawn up under the following headings:

- ◆ poverty and people
- ◆ welfare dependency and employment
- ◆ housing
- ◆ health and poverty
- ◆ educational disadvantage
- ◆ quality of life
- ◆ physical environment
- ◆ infrastructure and accessibility
- ◆ locally-specific aspects.

The poverty profile allowed the council to prioritise five key areas that the LAPS should address:

- ◆ rural disadvantage
- ◆ income adequacy
- ◆ unemployment
- ◆ housing and accommodation
- ◆ education

By investing in developing the poverty profile, the council was in a position where it knew—rather than merely suspect—what the actual poverty/exclusion issues and concerns in the county were.



CASE STUDY

Limerick City Council: Rent Review

A review of **Limerick City Council's** differential rent scheme was undertaken to assess whether or not the scheme contributed to the creation of poverty traps.

The review targeted local authority tenants and was the first of its kind in the Republic of Ireland.

The **Rent Review** found that;

- ❖ for some tenants, a small increase in income resulted in an increase in rent;
- ❖ in some cases, the increase in rent was larger than the increase in income meaning that these tenants were worse – off financially despite an increase in their income;

As a result of the **Rent Review**, **Limerick City Council** abandoned the banded-rent scheme. The Council introduced a fixed-percentage rent scheme which ensured that only a percentage of increase in income goes toward rent. This results in an increase in tenant income benefiting the tenant rather than penalising them.

5

How We Stand Locally: Involving People in Decision- Making

INTRODUCTION

In the previous section, the hard, quantitative aspects of poverty were examined. However valuable they are, such measures or indicators can never tell the full story about poverty or disadvantage in a local area. Certainly they provide a framework but to get the full picture there is a need to flesh out that framework. The most effective way of doing that is to talk to people in the know.

To promote social inclusion and tackle poverty it is necessary to consider ways of engaging with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in a meaningful way. This includes in the development of structures, policies, plans, actions and services. Many public bodies including local authorities are now familiar with and have adopted consultation processes to identify needs and hear the views of those affected by poverty. These processes are important to ensure that policies and services are in tune with local needs, whilst also offering a form of participation. However it is necessary to distinguish between consultation and participation, exploring what each means, how they differ, what they share and how they are interconnected. This chapter attempts to do this as well as offering principles and guidelines to support participation and consultation.⁷

What is meant by participation?

Participation can be broadly defined as the process of taking part in different spheres of life; the social, cultural, economic and political. Recent studies also emphasis the importance of the affective sphere. The 2002 *National Economic and Social Forum's Strategic Policy Framework* (pg. 47) recognises this as follows:

The affective domain refers to the socio-emotional relations that give people a sense of value and belonging and of being appreciated,

⁷ The section draws on three publications: O'Flynn, J, *People, Poverty and Participation*, Combat Poverty: 2009; Craig, S., *Involving Communities in Local Government*, Combat Poverty: 2000; Basset, M and Quinlan, M, *Pathways to Power*, Involve:2006.

loved and cared for in their community, associational and working lives.

All the spheres are interconnected and inequality of participation in one can lead to inequality of participation in others, e.g. people experiencing financial inequality and surviving on a low income are less likely to participate in the political sphere or women who experience inequality in the affective sphere as providers of most of the family care work often experience inequality in the economic and political spheres. Strategies to promote and support participation need to take this interconnectedness into account.

Participation and participatory democracy

Participation in the political sphere is also often linked to active citizenship and participatory democracy. A distinction is drawn between representative democracies—in which citizens are seen to have a voice through elections and referenda—and participative democracies which allow more direct input by individuals into political decision-making. Both types of democracy are complementary and make important contributions to the democratic process.

Participation and active citizenship

The 2007 Taskforce on Active Citizenship report defines active citizenship as:

the voluntary capacity of citizens and communities working directly together, or through elected representatives to exercise economic, social and political power in pursuit of shared goals

(‘The Concept of Active Citizenship’, pg. 5).

The report envisages high levels of civic engagement which can potentially contribute to the quality of decision-making and create a sense of belonging of individuals and communities. It also expects the democratic process to be ‘healthily challenged’ by a range of voluntary and community organisations.

In this context participation is linked to citizenship and seen as a right. Caution is required in this regard to ensure that linking participation with citizenship does not preclude the right to participate on the part of individuals and groups who are not citizens in the legal sense. Finally the ability to influence decision-making is emphasised as central to meaningful participation.

Participation by people affected by poverty and social exclusion

The definition of poverty contained in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and outlined in Section 2 refers to how inadequate material, cultural and social resources can result in people being excluded and marginalized. This definition acknowledges how spheres of participation are interconnected and highlights the risk of social exclusion—from all or some spheres—facing those affected by poverty.

More generally it is acknowledged that there are particular challenges for individuals and communities in terms of participation in the public and/or political sphere. Thus, while the need for public bodies to support participation in decision-making is increasingly emphasised, the role of community and voluntary organisations in this regard is also recognised.

The White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* (2000) states:

the sector has a specific role in ensuring the experiences and interest of marginalised communities and groups are articulated and heard when decisions that affect them are being made. Pg 89

Different levels of participation

There are many views on what constitutes participation. One useful way of thinking about it, is as a process spanning a range of levels from low to high participation. A particular emphasis in this approach is that processes at the lower level do not confer decision-making capacity on the community whilst those at the higher levels enable community representatives to be included in decision-making.

A widely used model to graphically represent and explain the idea of levels of participation is Arnstein's Ladder.

ACTIVITY

Reflecting on Participation in Your Local Authority

The below questions could guide reflection both on the Model and also on participation in your Local Authority

1. How useful do you think Arnstein's Ladder is for exploring the concept of participation?
2. How useful is the broad framework which differentiates the levels of participation, i.e. nonparticipation; tokenism; citizen power, and are the rungs associated with these helpful? Would you reorganise these? If so, in what way?
3. Reflecting on the approach taken by your local authority to involve local people, particularly those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, where would you place this on Arnstein's Ladder?
4. Does the approach differ across the authority and between different sections?
5. If the overall approach is on rungs 1-5, does this indicate a need to look again at the approach(es) being used?
6. Note any specific changes you think would strengthen participation.

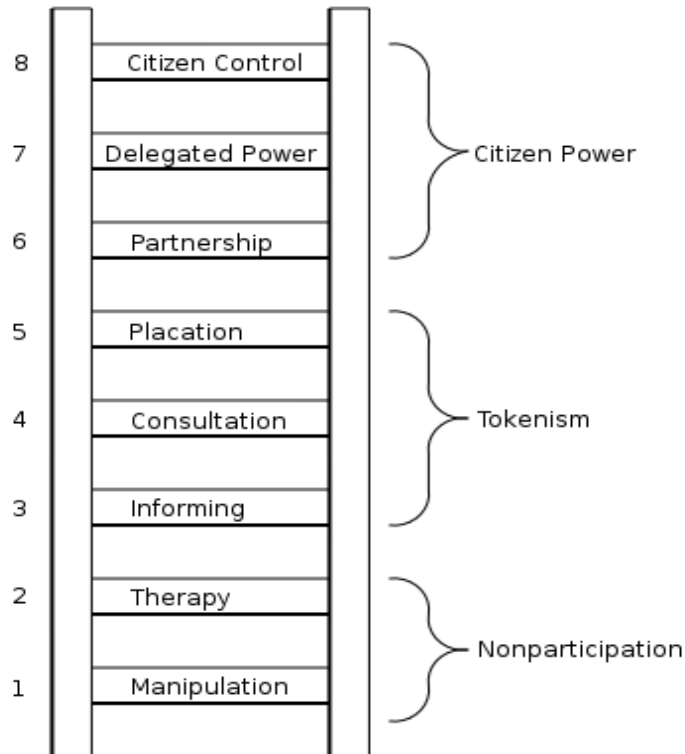
This reflection could also be done in a **group context** either within a section/department or cross departmental. The interactive aspect could be strengthened by allocating cards with individual rungs (but without the framework of levels) and ask participants to place them on a ladder of participation placing what they consider the higher order participation at higher levels. Then compare with Arnstein's and encourage discussion of any differences.

Alternatively, participants could be asked to consider an area of their own organisation's work and reflect on where they would place different areas of work on the ladder of participation. The cards which participants are allocated could refer to specific areas of work rather than concepts relating to participation.

Follow this discussion with small group work addressing questions 3-6 above.

Take brief feedback and focus a final discussion on what actions will be taken to strengthen participation.

Figure 1: Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Participation



Manipulation – the job of participation is to achieve public support for the authority's plans.

Therapy – nonparticipative, aimed at 'educating' the participants.

Informing – a first step to participation, but with the emphasis on a one-way flow of information. No channel of feedback.

Consultation – attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries.

Placation – through, for example, co-option of local people on to committees, it allows citizens to advise or plan. However, power holders retain the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

Partnership – power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared, for example, through joint committees.

Delegated power – citizens hold a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. Public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them.

Citizen control – local people handle the entire job of planning, policymaking and managing, with no intermediaries between them and the source of funds.⁸

In this model, there is an emphasis on linking the level of participation with whether there are shifts in control and decision-making from authorities or public power holders to citizens or communities. Arnstein's model also helps us see both the difference and connection between consultation and participation. Consultation is placed at level four while participation occurs at higher levels of six to eight. Many see consultation as necessary to enable participation but it does not equal participation.

There is increasing recognition that participation needs to go beyond consultation or information to include the opportunity to input into the identification of issues or 'policy problems' and into policy design, strategies and plans.

⁸ Arnstein, A., A Ladder of Citizen Participation, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969

In its recent national strategy for service user involvement the HSE, recognises the need to involve users in ‘defining the issues of concern to them’ and ‘in formulating and implementing policies.’

Participation and local government

In 1996 the Government published *Better Local Government: A Programme of Change* which sets out a framework and strategy for significant reforms within local government. The reform process aimed to establish new forms of local governance and participative decision-making processes. This gave rise to new structures involving local elected representatives, local state agencies and the social partners including the community and voluntary sector and local development agencies, such as Strategic Policy Committees, County/City Development Boards, Social Inclusion Measures Groups and the Community Fora.

Core Principles

1. Fostering local democracy
2. Serving the customer better
3. Developing efficiency
4. Providing proper resources

(Better Local Government: A Programme of Change - cited in Involving Communities in Local Government, Sarah Craig 2000).

It is sometimes observed that a more participative approach exists at local level compared to national level. An example of this is County/City Development Boards which are direct decision-making fora. Participation in these by the above range of interests, is a requirement and not a choice. It is also recognised that Strategic Policy Committees and Social Inclusion Measure groups whilst not decision-making structures in themselves can increase access to decision-making structures such as Corporate Policy Groups or Local Councils, who often take their recommendations on board.

There is a limited focus on building participation and democracy among people experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the Green Paper

Stronger Local Democracy, Options for Change. The need to build capacity is central to supporting participation.

Working with disadvantaged communities and groups requires long term investment in human resources, new structures of participation, time and consistency of approach by local authorities.

People, Poverty and Participation, Combat Poverty Agency: 2009

Community Fora were developed to facilitate a degree of input by voluntary and community organisations at local level but two main difficulties have been identified in terms of meaningful. They are not decision-making structures in terms of local public policy formation and the wide range of interests represented often result in a weak focus on poverty and social inclusion.

Nonetheless there are opportunities as well as responsibilities for local authorities to strengthen the capacity of those experiencing poverty to participate in structures such as County/City Development Boards, Strategic Policy Committees and Social Inclusion Measures and to strengthen Community Fora in terms of a focus on social inclusion.

Linking efficiency to empowerment

For people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, the motivation for and benefits of greater participation are closely linked. This is emphasised by the core principles of *Better Local Government: A Programme of Change* (outlined above). In official documents efficiency and effectiveness of policies are often emphasised as a core rationale but also the contribution to local democracy, participatory democracy and active citizenship are valued. In order to realise the latter benefits, empowerment of people experiencing poverty is increasingly recognised as both a prerequisite and an outcome of meaningful participation in decision-making. As noted in *People Poverty and Participation* (pg. 19)

Public participation can increase empowerment because it has the potential to redress power imbalances and social inequalities,

improve access to decision-making and contribute to making services more responsive and appropriate to community needs.

Not all public participation necessarily leads to empowerment. For this to become a certain outcome of participation, the local authority needs to make conscious policy decisions with associated strategy, plan and resources to promote and support empowerment.

Developing a participation strategy

The Combat Poverty Agency have produced a manual to support local authorities to develop a local anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy (LAPSIS) entitled *Developing a Local Anti-poverty And Social Inclusion Strategy: A Guide*. This outlines a step-by-step approach which could support the development of a participation strategy with a particular emphasis on people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The latter could be embedded in the LAPSIS or work alongside it.

Checklist to developing a participation strategy

- ✓ Set up a steering group to lead and drive the development of a strategy.
- ✓ Ensure the composition of the steering group is at a senior level and cross departmental.
- ✓ Agree clear terms of reference, timeframes and resources.
- ✓ Agree a vision of participation which will inform the work of the steering group. Use Arnstein's ladder (see pg. 70) to assist with this process.
- ✓ Agree a set of core principles and how these will be put into practice in the participation strategy.
- ✓ Conduct an audit of existing participation processes.
- ✓ Clarify who is (or is not) participating. Maintain a particular focus on the most marginalised groups.

- ✓ Evaluate current structures and processes with an emphasis on the level of participation, the experience of participation by all those involved, including those experiencing poverty, and the outcomes of the participation processes for all stakeholders.
- ✓ Include a gender analysis to facilitate an examination of differences in levels, experience and outcomes based on gender.
- ✓ Reflect on the findings of the audit and use the information collected to inform the development of the strategy and plan.
- ✓ Learn from best practice employed by other local authorities in Ireland and elsewhere.
- ✓ Prioritise capacity building and empowerment of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
- ✓ Adopt a whole-of-organisation approach.
- ✓ Include outcome and impact indicators which can be measured.
- ✓ Put in place monitoring, review and reporting structures and processes; include those experiencing poverty and social exclusion in these.
- ✓ Allocate adequate resources to implement and review the strategy and plan

Recognising the barriers to participation

There are many barriers to participation in decision-making particularly for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. These exist at a number of levels including system-level i.e. national government, local government and public bodies/agencies. There are also barriers which relate to the community and voluntary sector, as well as individuals and communities.

Barriers relating to system-level include: weaknesses in legislative and formal requirements to ensure participation; gaps and weaknesses in structures and processes to support participation; levels of leadership, commitment and understanding of participation, as well as the capacity and resources on the part of those in public bodies with responsibility to support participation.

In relation to the people experiencing poverty and organisations working with them, barriers can include weaknesses in infrastructure, e.g. lack of networks, capacity and resources. At individual and community level, barriers include financial and time costs of participation, lack of support for family care constraints, disability access issues and overall capacity and confidence.

Checklist to Support Participation

- ✓ Develop, implement and review a participation policy and strategy.
- ✓ Build capacity within the local authority and in individuals to be included in the participation.
- ✓ Do outreach work to include the most marginalised groups.
- ✓ Take account of the existence of inequality for women in public decision-making arenas.
- ✓ Create an appropriate setting for participation: accessibility of premises; geographic location; accessibility of language; ethos of meetings, i.e. all supported to partake in discussion; timing of meetings, e.g. take account of school times.

- ✓ Provide the full range of supports required including: support for family care role; language support for those for whom English is not a first language; financial supports to cover cost of participation, including transport.
- ✓ Provide resources to community and voluntary groups to build infrastructure, capacity and support for participation.
- ✓ Develop a communication and information system based on multiple flows between key stakeholders, i.e. not just top-down feedback.
- ✓ Provide feedback on how decisions taken in participative structures and processes are carried through and report the outcomes from these.

Learn from best practice

It is increasingly recognised that a community development approach to supporting participation is one of the most effective ways to ensure meaningful participation on the part of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The next section explains this approach.

CASE STUDY

Offaly: An Intercultural Approach—Social inclusion at local level

Offaly County Council, Community & Enterprise (C & E) and Tullamore Travellers Movement (TTM) developed the **Training of Trainers** initiative.

The initiative aimed to enable statutory, community and voluntary organisations to develop an intercultural approach within their policies, programmes and work practice.

The initiative also expected to:

- ❖ train 10 people from ethnic minority backgrounds, including Travellers, who in turn will deliver intercultural training;
- ❖ produce a pack, including information and resources, for organisations who have completed the training;
- ❖ improve Offaly County Council's service provision to ethnic minorities.

The **Training of Trainers** project resulted in:

- ❖ the training of eight Travellers and two asylum seekers as facilitators in the delivery of Promoting Interculturalism training;
- ❖ staff from all sections of the Offaly County Council and some County Development Board members took part in Promoting Interculturalism training workshops.

After six months, the **training workshops** were evaluated by questionnaires and a focus group. Feedback was very positive:

- ❖ participants felt the workshop was beneficial to their work and they learned a lot;
- ❖ some local authority staff members noted it was their first time speaking with a Traveller;

Local authorities and different individuals have achieved and learned a great deal from undertaking this initiative:

- ❖ asylum seekers working with TTM during the project requested support, thus identifying needs that were previously unknown. These needs were highlighted at Social Inclusion Measures meetings and work is now being done with more minority groups;
- ❖ the Travellers that delivered the workshops felt they were treated in a much more positive way by Offaly County Council staff;
- ❖ TTM experienced an increase in participation rates in interagency initiatives among service providers;
- ❖ the learning from the initiative is transferable and has been used to develop a Traveller specific training workshop to state agencies in the midlands.



CASE STUDY

Regenerating Tralee: Social inclusion in local authorities

A **Regeneration Steering Committee** was established in Tralee to govern a **regeneration initiative** with an overall focus on:

- ❖ physical, social and economic projects;
- ❖ the empowerment of local residents through participation.

The **regeneration initiative** targeted the Mitchels-Boherbee area near the centre of the town. About 700 houses occupy the area and its population is a mix of Travellers and settled people.

The Regeneration Steering Committee's members include 11 resident representatives, as well as locally-elected representatives. It is chaired by the manager of the Kerry County Council (KCC). This mix of elected and community representatives is a very important part of the initiative to promote inclusiveness in local authorities.

"I honestly believe that this kind of process has to become part of our core...you have to be working with the community." (Tralee Town Council Engineer)

A **Communication Participation Task Group (CPTG)** was also set up and its members include the 11 resident representatives and an additional group of sub-representatives, who offer reinforcement and support. This sub-group facilitate even more community consultation and participation.

A staff member from Tralee's Health Service Executive (HSE) Community Work Department co-ordinates the CPTG, while other state and community-based organisations have optimised community input. It has been noted by both community and local authority representatives that the role of the HSE staff member has been pivotal to the projects.

THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

In recent years there has been a growing awareness both of the value of and the need for community development approaches across the public sector. Community development is a method of working that can be used very effectively to tackle inequalities. It enables those who are marginalised and excluded to gain in self-confidence, join with others and participate in actions to influence change and exert control over the social, political and economic issues that affect their lives.

Community development should be central to anti-poverty work because it fights poverty but also because:

- ◆ it operates as an empowering force, aiming to include everybody as full and active citizens;
- ◆ it challenges discrimination by race, disability, age, political or religious beliefs, gender and sexual orientation;
- ◆ it is about people working together for community-led, democratic action;
- ◆ it works to prevent problems and promote well-being in social and not just medical terms;
- ◆ it encourages people to learn new skills and knowledge and develop confidence through taking action;
- ◆ it supports joint work between government (and their statutory agents) and people (as special interest groups and communities);
- ◆ it focuses on public policy, putting policy into practice and drawing on practice to inform public policy;
- ◆ it recognises that action can range from self-help to campaigning.

Community development can also operate at different levels, often simultaneously. Three common levels for community development activity are:

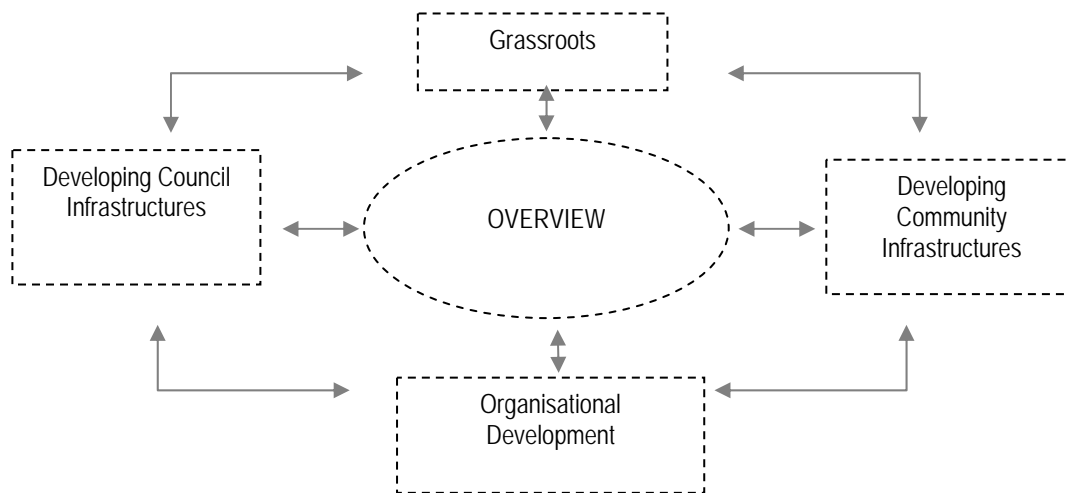
Personal: developing the self-confidence and skills of individuals.

Community: regenerating and revitalising disadvantaged communities or areas.

Public policy: influencing and shaping wider policies in favour of the disadvantaged.

MAINSTREAMING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN OUR COUNCIL: A MODEL

Councils might find this framework useful to structure their approaches to community development.



Grassroots: helping individuals and groups in the community to develop

For example ... what we do through estate management programmes

Developing Community Infrastructures: strengthening networks between groups, organisations and the community

For example ... in our work with community fora ensure that an antipoverty and social inclusion focus is emphasised and supported

Developing Council Infrastructures: encouraging networking links among services

and also professional links to facilitate mutual support and awareness between colleagues

For example ... building a poverty/exclusion focus into our corporate and business plans

Organisational Development:

the council changing and developing to strengthen its capacity to work with communities

For example ... developing our SPCs

Overview:

a forum or another mechanism to monitor the other four elements.

For example ... setting up a council anti-poverty steering group

THE NEED FOR CONSULTATION

Whether based on community development principles or not, an effective planning regime will include a robust approach to consultation. In developing an anti-poverty strategy there are two separate constituencies we need to consult:

- ◆ people/communities who experience or have experienced poverty and their representatives;
- ◆ other players or stakeholders involved in anti-poverty work.

There is no set list of who should make up these groups. That is for local authorities to decide in their own areas. Any anti-poverty strategy that does not reflect the experiences, views and aspirations of these constituencies will be a very flawed strategy.

WHO SHOULD WE TALK TO?

Use this template to help you identify who you should consult:

THOSE WHO KNOW WHAT POVERTY IS

CATEGORY

WHO?

WHAT INSIGHT WILL THEY BRING?

*Community groups
and networks
Individuals
Voluntary organisations
Tenants' groups*

Ensure groups working with the most marginalised groups are included.

THOSE WORKING AGAINST POVERTY

CATEGORY

WHO?

WHAT INSIGHT WILL THEY BRING?

*Political representatives
Community development
Health/social care
Education
Housing
Welfare
Economic development
Others in our Council
Faith groups
Combat Poverty Agency
NAPS Unit
Others*

The Seven-S Model and Community Development in Our Local Authority

STRATEGY

- ✓ Does the council have a clear sense of purpose in this area?
- ✓ Is it focused on the future?
- ✓ Is there a clear emphasis on outcome and impact?

STRUCTURE

- ✓ How do we reflect the importance of community development work?
- ✓ Are our structures meaningful to our community development partners/stakeholders?
- ✓ Is the structure flexible enough to deal with the new emphases/priorities?
- ✓ Does it encourage good communication?

SYSTEMS

- ✓ How could the council improve/support community development?
- ✓ Could we budget for it?
- ✓ How are decisions made?
- ✓ How do we plan, implement, manage and control our community development work?

STAFF

- ✓ Is staffing a big issue in terms of taking forward community development?
- ✓ Are the right sort of people in the right sort of jobs?
- ✓ What sort of employer is the council?
- ✓ Does it train and communicate with its staff?

SKILLS

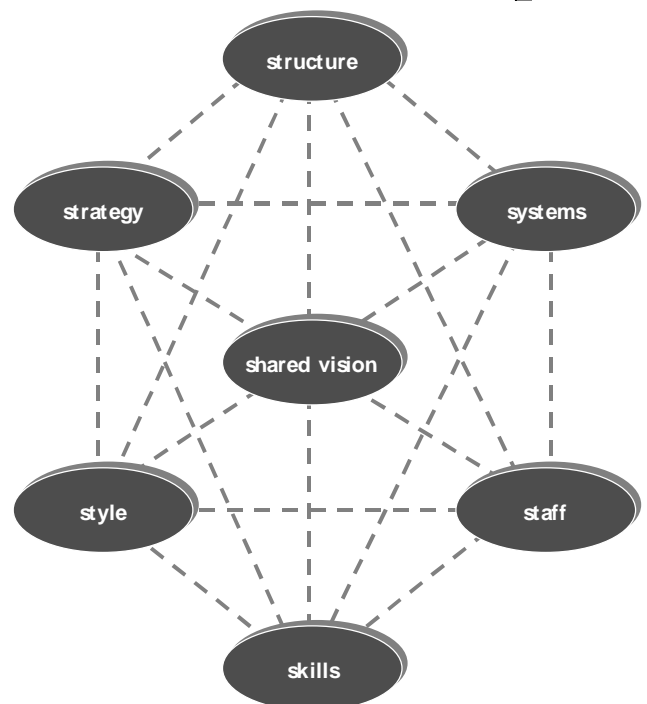
- ✓ Does the council have the right skill mix to foster community development in the way it wants to?
- ✓ Are there any current skills gaps?
- ✓ How does it invest in the staff it currently has?

STYLE

- ✓ What is the relationship with citizens and partners/stakeholders like?
- ✓ Does the council have a community development image? If so, what is it?
- ✓ Is there a clear sense of “the way we do things round here”?
- ✓ What does the council praise and reward?

SHARED VISION

- ✓ What does the council stand for in community development?
- ✓ Is there a clear agreement about what is important?



WHEN DO WE CONSULT?

There is no set time to carry out consultation. Consultation should not be seen as a one-off event or exercise that is 'done' and then pushed to one side. It should be seen as a continuous process. Ideally local authorities should consult others:

- ◆ before a project, service or initiative is developed to make sure it reflects people's needs as they see them;
- ◆ during the delivery of a project, service or initiative to gauge people's reactions to it and fine tune it accordingly;
- ◆ after the project, service or initiative has been delivered or implemented to see whether or not it has had the desired effect.

Thus in terms of an anti-poverty strategy we should consult before we draw it together; as we're implementing it; and after it has been put in place.

BENEFITS OF CONSULTATION

- ◇ *helps you plan services better to give users what they want, and expect*
- ◇ *helps you prioritise your services and make better use of limited resources*
- ◇ *helps you set performance standards relevant to users' needs (and monitor them)*
- ◇ *fosters a working partnership between your users and you, so they understand the problems facing you, and how they can help*
- ◇ *alerts you to problems quickly so you have a chance to put things right before they escalate*
- ◇ *symbolises your commitment to be open and accountable: to put service first*

GOOD PRACTICE IN CONSULTATION

- ◇ *clarify the boundaries at the outset*
- ◇ *know **what** it is you are consulting about: use the rule of thumb "I **need** to know that" rather than "It would be **interesting** to know that"*
- ◇ *keep your consultation focused*
- ◇ *know **who** it is you need to consult*
- ◇ *choose an appropriate technique*
- ◇ *plan the consultation:*
 - ✓ *what*
 - ✓ *when*
 - ✓ *how*
 - ✓ *by whom*
 - ✓ *at what cost*
- ◇ *provide feedback to those who were consulted*
- ◇ *take the results – both positives and negatives – seriously*
- ◇ *be ready to show how the consultation made a difference*

HOW TO 'DO' CONSULTATION

As highlighted earlier consultation can be an element or prerequisite to participation. The methods chosen often reflect the level of participation envisaged. Sometimes this is not fully intended or explicit so it is useful to consider the level of participation intended and how the chosen method supports this.

The methods chosen should also reflect the purpose of the consultation as well as core principles such as equality, inclusion and transparency. Putting these principles into action will require attention to details such as accessibility of premises (if used as part of consultation), language issues including 'signing', level of literacy required, accommodation for those whose first language is not English, use of Braille or IT solutions for those with impaired vision.

Principles of Good Consultation and Participation (From *Developing a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy*, Combat Poverty 2008: pgs. 20-21)

Decision principle

- ✓ Clearly define expectations and boundaries.
- ✓ Design the consultation so that it will inform a decision that is to be made.
- ✓ Make clear to the people you are consulting that they can change certain issues by responding to the consultation.
- ✓ Tell them clearly when they can expect to receive feedback on the consultation.

Competent and inclusive consultation

- ✓ Design the consultation exercise in a way that is statistically valid.
- ✓ Prior to the consultation identify the minimum sample return needed for the particular exercise.
- ✓ Make a systematic appraisal of all the consultation options available.
- ✓ Make sure that the method of consultation does not exclude relevant groups in the community.
- ✓ When planning for the sample of population to be selected, make sure that the sample contacted is not biased and that it represents the makeup of the population or service users.
- ✓ Hold a review after the consultation to identify any gaps in the sample returned. This is to ensure that the responses are as representative as the sample planned and that there are enough responses. Take follow-up action, where necessary.
- ✓ Consider what alternative methods of consultation can be used to cater for groups who find it more difficult to participate, for example by publishing

written material in Braille, by producing audio tapes, by translating documents if necessary, or by other means. It can be useful to work with groups who work with the most marginalised. One standard approach may not suit all target populations.

Using the results of the consultation

- ✓ Analyse the results of the consultation.
- ✓ Report internally and write up the conclusions and actions resulting from the exercise.
- ✓ Let the people you consulted know how their views were taken into account.

The following outlines some approaches to consultation:

Questionnaire-based surveys

This is the most traditional and probably the most widely used method of consulting people or service-users. Assuming the areas that the survey focuses on and its target group(s) have been addressed, the key issues in a questionnaire survey concern its structure and method of delivery.

The central issues regarding questionnaire structure can be summarised as follows:

- ◆ 'closed' questions oblige a respondent to give a certain answer, e.g. Yes/No or to rate a service or facility according to a scale;
- ◆ 'open' questions leave the shape and content of the response totally to the respondent;
- ◆ responses to 'closed' questions are easier to analyse;
- ◆ 'open' questions meanwhile give respondents more scope;
- ◆ a 'closed' question is often the best way to introduce an issue

QUESTIONNAIRE TIPS

- ◆ explain the purpose of the questionnaire or survey
- ◆ open with easy questions
- ◆ avoid negatives in questions: they confuse people
- ◆ put the questions in a logical sequence
- ◆ make your questions short and simple
- ◆ avoid ambiguity
- ◆ ask what people DO before asking what they THINK
- ◆ don't use leading questions, e.g. avoid the opening "Don't you agree that ... "
- ◆ always allow for people not having an opinion: include "Don't Know" options
- ◆ always pilot your draft questionnaire
- ◆ lengthy and/or poorly designed questionnaires will turn people off!
- ◆ always thank your respondents.

and an 'open' question the best way to develop or follow it up.

In terms of delivery, the main issues are:

- ◆ questionnaires completed by a trained surveyor through a face-to-face interview obtain the highest response rates and avoid ambiguity or misinterpretation but surveys undertaken in this way tend to be the most expensive;
- ◆ postal and/or self-completion questionnaires are cheaper but obtain low response rates (typically 20%) and are open to misinterpretation.

We also need to remember that one in four adults in Ireland has literacy problems. That fact should significantly affect when and how we use questionnaire-based surveys.

Focus groups

Focus groups are becoming increasingly popular across the public service generally. They have long been important within private sector market research. The core features of a focus group are as follows:

- ◆ usually 6/8 members;
- ◆ skilled facilitator required;
- ◆ lasts for up to two hours in a neutral, pleasant venue/setting;
- ◆ usually focuses on one or two issues only;
- ◆ the aim is to discuss, develop or tease out issues and themes;
- ◆ can be used for brainstorming;
- ◆ provide support for participants to attend e.g. cover transport costs, family care costs etc;
- ◆ the results of a focus group are not statistically significant.

In an anti-poverty context the focus group can be a useful consultation technique. It can be particularly valuable in terms of finding out 'what's what' within deprived or disadvantaged communities. Although care is

needed to ensure that the most marginalised are included and this may involve specific strategies such as 'outreach'.

Round-table workshops

This approach brings together a large number of people, often more than 100, for a working day. The workshop is usually most effective as a planning tool. Typically a number of themes are identified in advance and these are allocated to round tables of eight to ten participants. Each table concentrates on its allocated theme throughout the day. The tables usually mix people with experience or expertise in terms of the particular themes and those whose background lies in another area. A fact box presenting core information about the theme is given to each participant and one or more brief background presentations may be made. Each table also has its own facilitator.

The workshop usually runs for a morning and an afternoon session. In the morning the task is to identify the issues that are regarded as relevant to the particular theme being discussed. Having listed the issues, they are then prioritised using a voting method. In the afternoon the task moves on to deciding what should be done by whom, and when, about the top five or six priority issues.

Round table workshops have proved very effective at:

- ◇ bringing a wide variety of stakeholders together;
- ◇ getting a broad ownership of a planning process;
- ◇ enthusing people and creating great energy;
- ◇ making full use of all the experience and expertise brought by the participants;
- ◇ getting to the real heart or core of themes and issues;
- ◇ coming up with good and meaningful plans.

Open meetings

Open public meetings are a traditional, cheap and easily organised approach to consultation. The key guidelines for a successful open meeting are:

- ◇ make sure the topic or theme is appropriate, appealing and important to people;
- ◇ advertise it widely;
- ◇ hold it in a setting that is warm, comfortable, accessible and with good acoustics;
- ◇ make sure it is well chaired;
- ◇ don't allow individuals or individual interests to hijack the discussion;
- ◇ make sure those who want to contribute are heard;
- ◇ ensure the participation of people with language and literacy difficulties, e.g. sign interpreters for people with hearing difficulties etc;
- ◇ stick to the advertised timing;
- ◇ don't give the impression that people there can vote for or mandate particular courses of action;
- ◇ after the event let people know what difference it made.

In-depth interview

This is a one-to-one interview aimed at developing a deeper understanding of a topic or issue. It usually lasts up to 90 minutes, a time commitment that needs to be made clear to potential participants. The interview needs to have a structure. In a local anti-poverty context typical areas of focus might be:

- ◇ why and how a particular service was used?
- ◇ what is looked for/expected of the service?
- ◇ what the user's priorities are?
- ◇ how the council performs against these objectives?
- ◇ the performance of the council's service relative to other similar services;

- ◆ what users might expect in future?

A council will have to be selective in identifying potential interviewees. It will not be feasible to carry out an in-depth interview with a representative of each of an area's poverty/anti-poverty groups or constituencies. The main use of the in-depth interview is to identify and highlight issues or themes that can be explored further, for example, through a questionnaire survey. It might be appropriate, therefore, to carry out one or two a year, each focusing on a different user group.

Finally, the need to prepare for this technique cannot be over-stressed. The interviewer needs to have an interview structure prepared and worked through in advance. He/she has to have good inter-personal skills and an understanding of the circumstances of the interviewee as well as the ability to control the shape and direction of a discussion. An ability to grasp and summarise key issues is important – though many interviews are taped, subject to the interviewee's agreement. Finally, a token payment should be offered to the interviewee.

Mystery shopping

This is a technique that is commonly used in the private sector, particularly the retail sector. A researcher poses as a service user and takes note of, for example, a council's performance across a range of services or activities. The idea is to take an anonymous look at a service or facility, from the perspective of a user. This is essentially the approach that many newspaper restaurants reviewers use: they play the part of an ordinary customer and then report on the service they received. Care must be taken, however, in terms of how mystery shopping overall is presented to council staff. It must be promoted in a positive way and any suggestions of deceit or spying firmly dismissed. The purpose of mystery shopping is not to catch out staff but rather to obtain, in a structured way, a user's view of the service.

USING WHAT'S ALREADY THERE

In consultation, as in life generally, we should avoid re-inventing the wheel. Right across the country there is a wealth of consultation feedback already available that could and should be used to inform local anti-poverty strategies. Consultation has been central to many other initiatives, for example, County and City Development Boards, urban and rural regeneration strategies and many parts of public service development. Much of that consultation focused either directly or indirectly on the poverty

and social exclusion agendas. We should make sure we extract full value from it.

FEEDING BACK

Consultation has to be a two-way process. Having asked people what they think, we need eventually to go back to them and let them know what difference if any their contribution made. While people do like their ideas to be acted on, research has consistently shown that lack of information or feedback is what really frustrates people. If we don't give feedback, people will very quickly lose faith in our consultation process and will no longer take part in it.

CONSULTATION CHECKLISTS

The checklists that follow will help local authority staff clarify their thinking on how they might take anti-poverty consultation forward. Before reading them, remember that anti-poverty consultation can focus on many different things and take many different forms. In terms of focus, for instance, it might want to find out:

- ◆ how core council services, e.g. housing, are currently perceived?
- ◆ what people's real, unmet needs are?
- ◆ what more a council should do?
- ◆ how people might prioritise various anti-poverty responses?

Anti-Poverty Consultation Checklist: 1

You need to **plan** your consultation. How many of the activities below are relevant to your consultation?

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Write consultation plan with dates for tasks | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Choose the method(s) you will use | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Establish what you want to find out | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Establish whose views you want | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Write terms of reference to tender the work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Design a sample | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Design a questionnaire | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Background research | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Organise venue(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Resource the participants (e.g. travel, childcare) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Select, brief and train surveyors | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Undertake pilot of the survey | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Arrange translations and interpreters? | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Design and print materials | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Administration and postage | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Carry out consultation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Input and check data | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Analyse data | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prepare reports | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Dates for reporting findings | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Feedback to those consulted | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Use of results | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Anti-Poverty Consultation Checklist: 2

What do you want to find out and **who** can best provide the information you need? Use the checklist below:

Direct users	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indirect users	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-users	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internal customers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Councillors	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community development workers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intended benefits of service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unintended benefits of service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Potential users	<input type="checkbox"/>
Numbers using a service	<input type="checkbox"/>
User satisfaction baseline or starting point	<input type="checkbox"/>
User satisfaction benchmark (from elsewhere)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Previous user satisfaction score	<input type="checkbox"/>
User satisfaction target	<input type="checkbox"/>

Anti-Poverty Consultation Checklist: 3

Service **quality** in terms of existing local authority services should be a central focus of anti-poverty consultation. Among the aspects of quality that could be considered are:

Reliability: things happen as they should	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responsiveness: things change to meet users' needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competence: staff know what they are doing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessibility: users find it easy to get access to what is needed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Courtesy: staff are polite, respectful and friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication: users are kept informed in ways they understand	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choice: alternatives provided if what is needed is not immediately available	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost effective: gives value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appropriate: fits the range of customer needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aesthetics: good physical appearance	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall user satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>

CONSULTATION: A 'HEALTH WARNING'!

Consultation is vitally important but frequently not easy. Among the difficulties or pitfalls one needs to be aware of are:

- ◇ *raising people's expectations unduly*
- ◇ *hearing what we want to hear and ignoring unwanted messages*
- ◇ *using jargon and talking to people in ways they don't understand*
- ◇ *only using consultation as a last resort ... when we have run out of ideas ourselves*
- ◇ *not being honest with people in terms of what is and isn't up for discussion/negotiation*
- ◇ *doing it because we have to and not because we believe in it.*

Anti-Poverty Consultation Checklist: 4

Consultation is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Its results need to be summarised, presented and acted upon. Some key areas for analysis of, and action on, anti-poverty consultation feedback could be:

Changes in user satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>
Users' views on strengths of the service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Users' views on weaknesses of the service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Users' suggested improvements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Possible changes in the cost of service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Possible changes in how the service is delivered	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good things about the service	<input type="checkbox"/>
Things about the service that need improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Proposed improvements	<input type="checkbox"/>
New satisfaction targets	<input type="checkbox"/>
New service standards	<input type="checkbox"/>
New target performance against benchmark	<input type="checkbox"/>

AND FINALLY

If a consultation is to be effective, then we have to be open and honest with people about 'what's up for grabs' in the consultation. We need to make it clear what can be changed as a result of consultation and, equally, what can't. Much of what local authorities do is set down by law. We shouldn't raise people's expectations about what's negotiable or changeable.

It is important to periodically review how people, particularly those affected by poverty and social exclusion, experience the participation and consultation processes of your authority. These can be built into the

participation and consultation strategy proposed earlier. If such a strategy does not yet exist an audit and review of current processes could be the starting point for the development of such a strategy.

CONSULTATION

My Action Plan

- 1 Do I need to consult? Why?
- 2 If so, who? One group or more than one? Has any group got a particular priority?
- 3 Are there any specific issues/topics I have to concentrate on?
- 4 Can I piggy-back on others' work? Is there proxy information already available? Can others piggy-back on my work?
- 5 How will I consult? Survey ... focus group ... other?
- 6 Do I need outside help? What will the cost of that be?
- 7 What internal resources (time, materials) will be used?
- 8 Would a 3/5 year plan be valid? Do I need to monitor results over time or use different approaches over time?
- 9 Do I know anyone else who has already done this? Can I learn from them?
- 10 The plan in summary:

	Focus of the Consultation	Method	Timing	Cost	Report/ Feedback
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

CASE STUDY

Waterford City Council has developed a formal **Consultation Policy** that provides guidance for its staff on when, how, and on what issues the community should be consulted. At the strategic level the policy:

- ◆ highlights its roots in the relevant local government legislation
- ◆ outlines a series of guiding principles for consultation undertaken by the council
- ◆ makes it clear why the council is interested in consultation
- ◆ sets a number of consultation standards.

The core of the policy outlines how consultation should be taken forward. It does this under a number of headings:

- ◆ Planning the consultation
- ◆ Purpose of the consultation
- ◆ Anticipated outcomes
- ◆ Timing
- ◆ Background information required
- ◆ Stakeholders
- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Accessibility
- ◆ Previous consultation methods
- ◆ Feedback after the event.

The policy is published in the form of a 12-page A5 booklet. It is also condensed into 25 bullet points that are presented on a laminated A4 page. That laminated page is comprehensively distributed across the council.

CASE STUDY

Wicklow: Developing an anti-poverty and social inclusion strategy

Wicklow County Development Board (CDB) developed an interagency initiative to address and implement National Action Plan inclusion goals at local level.

The **Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy (LAPSIS)** aimed to:

1. address the needs of groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion;
2. foster an understanding of poverty and social exclusion among service providers;
3. give people at risk of poverty and social exclusion a voice in policy development;
4. ensure new policies did not inadvertently lead to or reinforce and types of exclusion.

How was the strategy implemented?

- ❖ Local development groups and organisations consulted with their service users. During facilitated sessions both target group representatives and service providers addressed:
 1. what services the target groups required;
 2. the group's use of existing services;
 3. the existing barriers to accessing the services;
 4. possible solutions to the issues raised.
- ❖ An annual action plan was created to prioritise certain themes and target groups. Example: the 2007 action plan focused on:
 1. Travellers;
 2. older people (especially those of limited means);
 3. people with disabilities;
 4. children and young people (especially those at risk of early school-leaving).
- ❖ Wicklow CDB receives updates on LAPSIS and the Social Inclusion Measures (SIMS) Group monitors progress.

Examples of LAPSIS **action results** include:

1. improved participation and attainment by Traveller students;
2. a raised awareness of the issue of bullying in schools;
3. the development of County Wicklow Network for Older People;
4. a trained Participatory Learning in Action team to improve community consultation;
5. the expansion of an on-line directory for the whole county designed with ease of access to information in mind.

Overall, LAPSIS has strengthened the social inclusion focus of Wicklow County Council and there is an increased willingness to source support, advice and ideas externally.

CASE STUDY

Leitrim: An Saol Maith—Social inclusion initiatives targeted at older people

‘An Saol Maith’ translates to ‘The Good Life.’

As part of an overall local anti-poverty strategy, Leitrim County Council began the ‘**An Saol Maith**’ **project** to identify ways of improving the quality of life of older people in the county.

Why did the initiative focus on this group of older people?

- ❖ 16% of Leitrim’s population is over 65 years old (compared with the national average of 11.1%), which indicated a need for issues affecting this group to be examined and planned for by service providers in the county;
- ❖ older people were one of the groups identified by Social Inclusion Measures (SIMS) Group because of their vulnerability and susceptibility to poverty;
- ❖ concerns were raised through the Community Forum that older people did not have a voice on decision-making bodies and that they (older people) wanted a greater involvement in how, where and what services were delivered in Leitrim.

The goals set by the initiative were to:

- ❖ improve quality of life and access to services for older people;
- ❖ eliminate the feeling of disconnection among older people and increase their participation in activities in Leitrim;
- ❖ change policy and activities to be more inclusive of older people;
- ❖ publish detailed and credible research results to be used to substantiate submissions and recommendations to the county’s service providers;
- ❖ design an awards scheme to recognise the ‘different faces of older people’;
- ❖ identify the overlap, duplication and gaps in the services provided to older people.

How was the ‘**An Saol Maith**’ initiative implemented?

1. a sub-group of the SIMS Group was formed to become the Steering Group of the initiative. It was made up of older people, the Community Forum and interagency representatives, including members of the Health Service Executive West, Leitrim County Council, County Leitrim Partnership and Community Connections CDP;
2. Age Action Ireland provided training to local authority staff and the Steering Group on being aware of what life is like for an older person;
3. to identify the issues that affect older people and to gather suggested solutions, an external researcher worked with the Steering Group to carry out **focus groups** and individual **case studies** with:
 - a. active age groups;
 - b. individual older people;
 - c. interagency service providers;
 - d. the Community Forum;

4. the issues and proposed solutions were brought to the county's service providers;
5. a 30 **point action plan**—including timeframes—was agreed with service providers.
6. the action plan was communicated through the interagency representatives and various newsletters and the publication of the report in hard copy and on website.

The **Action Plan** and Results:

- ❖ the 30 agreed actions on the plan were grouped under headings, including:
 - ✓ Repairs and Streetscapes;
 - ✓ Refuse and Recycling;
 - ✓ Home Improvement/Essential Repair Grants;
 - ✓ Home Supports;
 - ✓ Health Supports;
 - ✓ Transport and Customer Care;
- ❖ the Steering Group are responsible for evaluating and monitoring the progress of each action, while different agencies and active age groups carry out individual tasks;
- ❖ the Community Forum keep older people informed of the actions through their publications and at their events.
- ❖ Leitrim County Council has identified the following as some of the results of the 'An Saol Maith' project:
 1. additional seating has been placed in health service areas frequently used by older people;
 2. measures have been taken to calm traffic around health centres;
 3. the Environment Education Officer has visited all active age groups, providing information on environmental issues;
 4. some grant application forms were redesigned to be more user-friendly;
 5. the roles of community wardens were profiled in the Leitrim Observer and explained during visits to all active age groups, as well as a list of councillors and contact details distributed through local newspapers;
 6. positive awareness training has been provided to Leitrim County Council staff;
 7. the mobile cinema was used as a mobile information unit;
 8. HSE West has also taken on actions to improve the quality of their services to older people and delivered Positive Ageing information sessions to all staff working with older people.

6

Developing a Local *Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy*

INTRODUCTION

Since 2003, Combat Poverty has been working with individual local authorities to develop pilot Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategies (LAPSIS). The manual sets out an approach to the development of a LAPSIS. While based on the experience of local authorities and County/City Development Boards which Combat Poverty has supported directly, it is not meant to be a definitive 'how to' guide. Rather, it is indicative, drawing together the learning developed so far so that others can benefit from it.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A LAPSIS?

Because detailed guidance is available in *Combat Poverty's Guide to Developing a LAPSIS* (2008), this manual doesn't look in detail at what should be in a LAPSIS or how one should be put together. However, it is appropriate to give a brief sense of those things.

To start with, a Local Anti-Poverty Strategy is an agreed framework to address poverty and social inclusion within each local authority area. The LAPSIS should have both an internal and external focus. In the first instance the LAPSIS should look at the operation and service delivery of the local authority itself to make sure that its services are being delivered and targeted in a way that maximises their anti-poverty and social inclusion impact. The LAPSIS should also have an external focus in which the local authority would seek to work in partnership with external agencies in order to develop a countywide or citywide strategy to address poverty.

Within the council, an organisational and strategic programme should be developed to support the development of the internal strategy. These programmes can have a variety of purposes or themes aiming to:

- ◆ raise awareness of how councils' work can deliver better outcomes for people experiencing poverty and exclusion, i.e. the groups we looked at in Section 2;

- ◆ ensure that poverty and exclusion are seen to be relevant—even if in differing degrees—to all council services, functions and staff;
- ◆ help find out more about the needs, wants and aspirations of people who are excluded or marginalised and target council resources on these;
- ◆ develop integrated responses to poverty and exclusion across the council;
- ◆ achieve a more efficient use of council resources.

THE POTENTIAL OF A LAPSIS

The real potential of a LAPSIS lies in its capacity to bring a council's strategic objectives regarding poverty/exclusion to tangible, working life. As pointed out in Section 3, councils are obliged to include their intentions of improving social inclusion locally in their corporate plans. Putting a good, robust LAPSIS in place will ensure this happens.

ISSUES OF STRUCTURE

It is true to say that “structure follows strategy”. Having developed a LAPSIS, local authorities need to be confident that the structures are in place to deliver it. If part of the LAPSIS involves outreach, can the maintenance of a centralised organisation be justified? If it is going to be a focus on the direct delivery of training, are there people available to do it?

Increasingly in anti-poverty work we rely on partnership approaches. A number of beliefs underpin this approach:

- ◆ partnerships can bridge the cultures of the public, private and voluntary/community sectors to everyone's benefit;

- ◇ partnerships facilitate a better targeting of resources;
- ◇ partnerships help develop relationships and thereby strengthen communities and organisations;
- ◇ partnerships can create synergy where the whole is much more than the sum of its parts.

FIVE Cs OF PARTNERSHIP

Ideally partnerships should have a number of the features that are necessary for successful partnership. These are:

Consultation: with the community in which the partnership is situated about what the needs of the area are.

Community Involvement: in the broader network that the partnership should establish over time to ensure that people know what is happening.

Communication: at board level, sub-committee level and at ground level.

Commitment: by all of those who are involved in the many layers of the partnership structure.

Control: of local decision-making about resources for the area.

Source: Sarah Craig, Making Partnership Work, pg. 3

Most important of all, good partnerships will ensure a strong input from and involvement by people who actually know or experience the realities of poverty.

For effective partnerships we need the following conditions in place:

- ◇ motivation for each of the partners
- ◇ power-sharing and equality between them
- ◇ strong local membership
- ◇ access to policymaking
- ◇ a strong community infrastructure
- ◇ clarity
- ◇ openness
- ◇ trust
- ◇ clear expectations

◆ shared objectives.

If a local authority has, or wants to have, a partnership approach, it must be incorporated in the LAPSIS processes. It cannot expect to plan on its own if it already engages, or intends to engage, closely with others.

The ideal group to monitor the LAPSIS is a subcommittee of the SIMs group. Given the focus of the strategy on poverty and social exclusion, care should be taken to ensure that people who experience these issues firsthand or the groups that represent them have a seat at the table and an active role in the development and monitoring of the strategy.