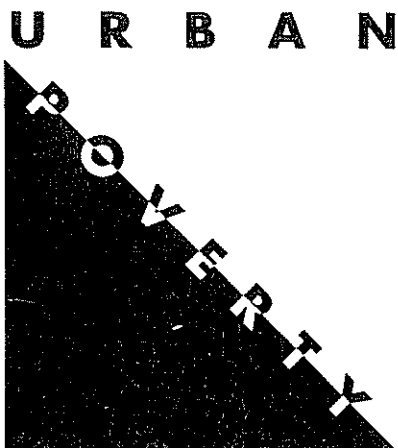


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Conference Report and Overview



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URBAN POVERTY - STRATEGIES FOR THE '90S

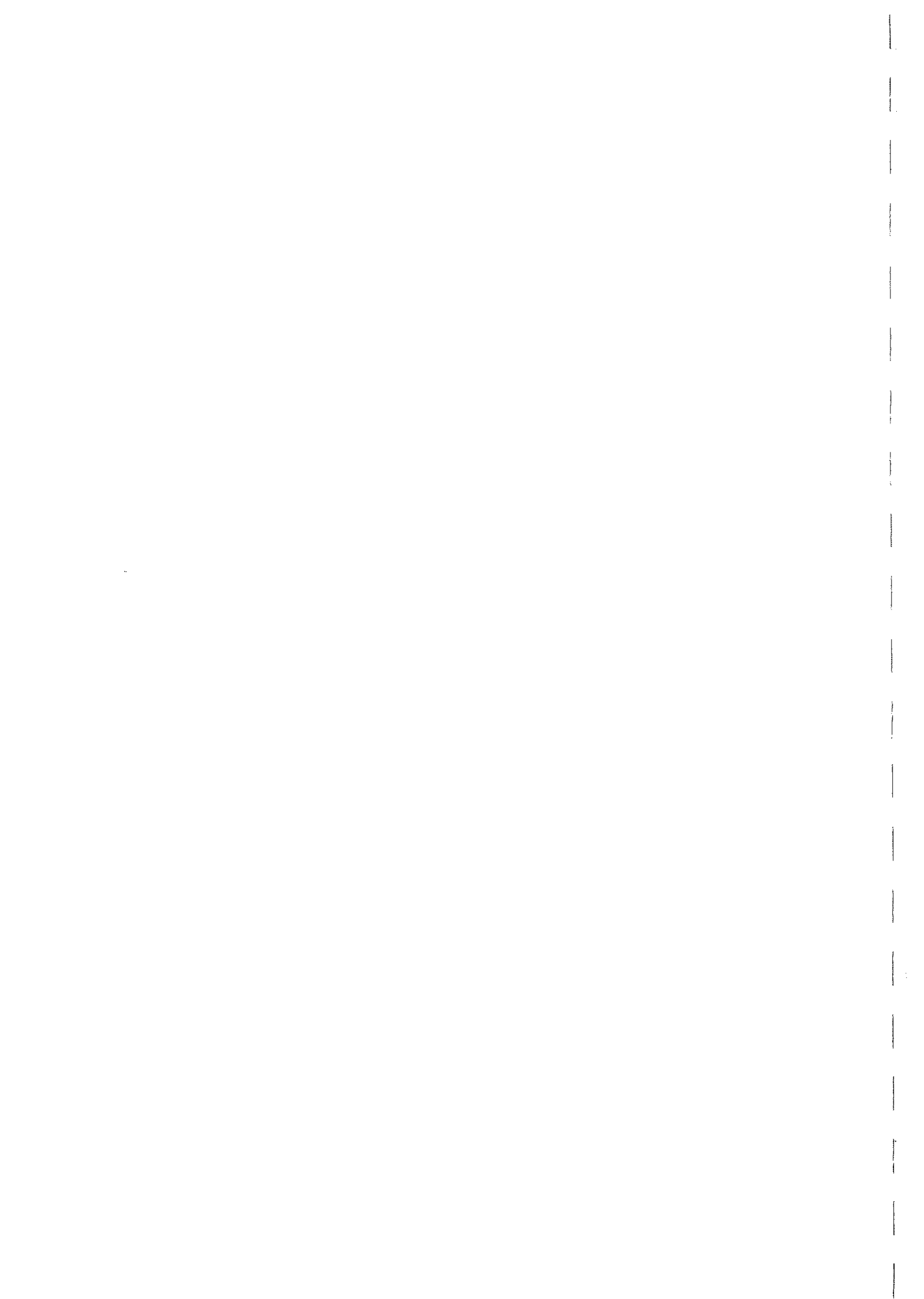
A Report and Overview

by

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Conference Rapporteur

COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

1992



SUMMARY

- * Urban poverty in Ireland is widespread and severe. It involves great pain together with economic, social and cultural exclusion. Society is increasingly divided with concentrations of poverty and unemployment in particular areas. Underlying poverty are deep-seated structural inequalities and very high levels of unemployment.
- * If urban poverty is to be tackled four prerequisites will be necessary: a public awareness of, and commitment to, tackling poverty; strong civic leadership; the involvement of those affected by poverty in the design of solutions; and continued economic growth and progress.
- * At a national level there is a need to develop structures at the heart of Government which will overcome the current segmented and sectorial approach. All national policies should be examined to ensure that they are contributing to increasing social equity and resources should be targeted on the most disadvantaged communities. Increasing equity in the tax system and improving income maintenance measures to ensure that everyone has an adequate standard of living will be critical.
- * At a local level there should be a comprehensive and integrated response to the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. There should be a coherent, planned and coordinated approach involving a partnership between all the different sectors: public agencies, the social partners and local voluntary and community bodies.
- * Key ingredients in successful partnerships include the following: allowing time for partners to consciously build trust and develop agreed goals; support and resources to the community sector to enable them to participate as equals; the development of flexible structures which promote participative decision-making; the sharing of control over the allocation of resources; skilled leadership; training in partnership skills; well-resourced local community development projects; and decentralised administrative and political structures.
- * The long-term unemployed should be prioritised. It should be recognised that their plight results primarily from their exclusion from the labour market rather than from them giving up looking for work or from becoming demotivated and deskilled. Improving their access to jobs through locally based high quality placement and counselling services is likely to be the most effective intervention especially if combined with measures to encourage employers to give a higher priority to the long-term unemployed.

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FOREWORD

In May 1991 the Combat Poverty Agency organised a major one day conference on urban poverty. It was opened by the then Minister for Labour, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D. The conference was inspired by a new report, "Urban Poverty, the Economy and Public Policy", which had been commissioned by the Agency from a team of Irish and British experts, headed by Professor David Donnison of Glasgow University. This report examines the nature of urban poverty and identifies the key lessons to be drawn from efforts to address concentrated urban disadvantage the UK and in other EC countries.

The purpose of the conference was to consider the relevance of the UK and EC experience to the Irish situation and in particular to consider the lessons presented in the context of the recently announced area-based initiatives on long-term unemployment. It was attended by some 150 people. There was a broad mix of people from local community groups, government departments and other public agencies, local authorities, the private sector, political parties and trade unions. Indeed, as the Minister for Labour commented, the combination of senior people from the various sectors and representatives of local groups was impressive. It demonstrated a high degree of interest and concern about urban poverty. There was also a feeling at the conference that there is now a real opportunity for the different sectors to join together with those affected by poverty to address the issues in a concerted and coordinated way. As David Donnison said in his introduction he had encountered much hope when researching his report. There is much that is positive in Ireland: a growing economy, active local communities, an increasing commitment to addressing problems and real hope for change. This is welcome because much needs to change if poverty is to be addressed.

This report and overview is a compilation of key points that emerged from the day. It is not intended as a verbatim report. Rather it is a distillation of points that seemed to be important or at least to merit further consideration and discussion. In compiling it I have developed some of the points made by drawing on the Agency's experience in working to combat urban poverty and on insights gained from attending similar events in Europe over the past year. Inevitably such an overview has to be selective and it is not possible to do justice to all the detailed comments that were made. I hope that it will contribute to the ongoing debate on addressing urban poverty and that it will help to inform future action. People interested in pursuing the issues raised are strongly urged to read "Urban Poverty, the Economy and Public Policy" copies of which are available from the Combat Poverty Agency.

HUGH FRAZER
31st January 1992



1. THE NATURE OF URBAN POVERTY

There was general acceptance at the Conference that there is widespread and severe poverty in Ireland. It was noted that in Ireland poverty is more prevalent than in most other EC countries and that this is in the context of poverty increasing in the EC from some 35.5 million people in the 1970s to around 50 million at the present time. Five features of poverty were repeatedly stressed. These were: the pain of poverty, exclusion from the mainstream of society, the increasingly divided nature of society, severe inequality and very high levels of unemployment.

Pain of Poverty

The views of some economists and politicians who deny the existence of poverty and challenge relative definitions of poverty were strongly refuted. It was repeatedly pointed out that people living in poverty in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe suffer real pain that is preventable. Research has shown that those who are poor experience more illness and greater anxiety and psychological problems. They have a shorter life expectancy and a higher probability of suicide. They often have a poor diet. Inadequate income means that there is a constant struggle to survive and make ends meet. Family events such as First Communion, a birth, death or Christmas can be a disaster for the family budget and often result in indebtedness. Basic services that many of us take for granted like education, health, housing, transport and legal services are experienced as being inferior and second-class and in some cases almost inaccessible. There is little or no say in the provision of the services and their delivery can often be experienced as degrading and humiliating by the recipient.

Exclusion

Poverty is not only about lack of income. It is about being excluded from the mainstream of society. People experiencing poverty are excluded culturally and socially as well as economically. This reinforces feelings of powerlessness and lack of choice. For many poverty is multi-dimensional with the consequences of low income being reinforced by poor housing and environmental conditions, lack of access to jobs and services and lack of social, cultural and recreational opportunities. They are in effect denied basic social rights and the opportunity to enjoy the full benefits of citizenship.

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The interaction of the various facets of poverty make it very difficult for people who are excluded to get back into the mainstream of jobs and society. The complexity of poverty in Ireland is such that there are no easy solutions and no one measure will be sufficient to tackle it. It will be necessary to research and understand better the processes that cause exclusion and then to develop a combination of policies and actions which address poverty in a holistic and integrated way.

Exclusion is often reinforced by discrimination, for instance on grounds of gender, race or sexual orientation. In particular Travellers experience exclusion because of a lack of acceptance of cultural diversity. Their distinctive identity is denied and their economic base is eroded. Similarly, those with disabilities can suffer because society does not adequately cater for their social and economic integration.

Exclusion can be further increased by the use of language. Terms like "the poor" and "the disabled" dehumanise people experiencing poverty and encourage us to think of them as different or as people apart from the rest of society. The use of jargon and hierarchical procedures at meetings also intimidates and excludes people experiencing poverty from participating in discussions about how poverty should be addressed. Thus their voice is often not heard and infrequently listened to.

A Divided Society

There is a trend in urban areas across Europe for the increasing spatial concentration of poverty. This was emphasised by the then Minister for Labour, Bertie Ahern, when opening the conference, by Professor Donnison in his keynote address and echoed thereafter by contributors throughout the day. This trend is particularly acute in Ireland. Society has become very stratified and a combination of economic restructuring and public policy, particularly bad planning, has created areas of severe economic and social marginalisation in which people experience multi-dimensional deprivation. These areas are typically decaying inner city communities or large one-class public housing estates on the urban periphery. This is a trend that could well continue as a result of further economic restructuring and the shake out of excess capacity in some industries that will occur

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with the introduction of the single European market.

There is a danger that divisions are becoming deeply entrenched with about two-thirds of society doing steadily better while around one third are surviving on the fringes of or outside the social and economic mainstream. Thus, while there have been improvements in social welfare levels over the last few years, they still remain significantly below what experts consider a minimally adequate income. Furthermore increases in pay combined with tax cuts, mean that the gap between many people in work and those dependent on social welfare has actually grown.

Very often public welfare services, which were designed to tackle old forms of poverty, actually reinforce divisions. For instance, lack of flexibility in social welfare and means tested benefits can make it exceedingly difficult to move back into the economic mainstream and can help to trap people in poverty. In some cases, for instance education, the better off actually benefit more from a combination of tax reliefs and public expenditure than those in poverty.

Divisions are further reinforced by an increasingly fragmented labour force with the majority in well-paid skilled jobs while a significant minority are either unemployed or in unskilled, insecure and low-paid jobs with few prospects of improvement. Particularly worrying is the number of families with children, especially large families, growing up in poverty in these excluded communities. They are in effect inheriting a legacy of exclusion and marginalisation. They have few role models to give them hope of anything better. They are excluded from informal networks and contacts. Overall they have little opportunity to compete equally with their peers from better off sections of society. In the future, demographic changes with growing numbers of elderly people and an increased dependency ratio, could also lead to further divisions in society.

Severe Inequality

It is clear from the nature of urban poverty that it is not the result of individual failings but rather the result of deep-seated structural problems in the way our society is organised. Furthermore, in a relatively wealthy society like

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Ireland, poverty is not inevitable. It results from the very unequal way in which access to resources and opportunities like income, wealth and jobs are distributed.

In recent years this inequality has been reinforced by the very uneven spread of the benefits of economic growth. It is also becoming clear that a rising economic tide can actually increase the exclusion experienced by some people. While on the one hand the advantages of growth mean more washing machines, central heating and cars, on the other hand it also results in less launderettes, a decline in bus services, more big shops at the expense of corner shops and so on. Luxuries are converted into necessities for those experiencing poverty and the poor become confined in high cost neighbourhoods with poor services. Thus addressing poverty will require that inequalities are tackled and that opportunities are distributed in a fairer and more just manner throughout society.

High Unemploy- -ment

Fundamental to the intensity and scale of urban poverty is the exceptionally high level of unemployment in Ireland which is the highest in the EC. Particularly significant is the very high numbers of people experiencing long-term unemployment (42% of the registered unemployed have been unemployed for more than one year) and their concentration in particular neighbourhoods. This does much to explain the persistence of widespread urban poverty. There is much evidence of the disastrous impact of long-term unemployment on individuals, families and whole communities.

2. PREREQUISITES FOR ACTION

If urban poverty is to be tackled it is clear that a range of national and local actions will be necessary and these are dealt with in subsequent sections. However, during discussions at the conference four prerequisites were repeatedly highlighted as being necessary if effective action is to happen. These are: a public awareness of and commitment to tackling poverty; civic leadership; the involvement of those affected by poverty in the design of solutions; and continued economic growth and progress.

Public Attitudes

As tackling poverty will require major change in the distribution of resources and opportunities it is unlikely to happen until there is a broad public consensus on the need for such change. It is a question of choice and national priority. As one contributor pointed out there is still much public indifference. In recent years poverty has been extensively documented and analysed but we as a nation have not yet decided that we really want to do anything about it. It is thus important to continue to educate the general public and to increase their awareness of both the nature and scale of poverty and the measures that need to be taken to tackle it. They need to be aware that poverty represents a denial of basic social rights. The public must understand the benefits for the economy and society of reducing poverty and severe inequality. They also need to appreciate the costs and consequences of not doing so - the waste of resources and talents, the costs of social programmes, the risk of social disorder and the threat to political stability and credibility. They thus need to be persuaded that it is necessary to pay taxes to help excluded groups and communities.

One barrier to creating a broader national consensus is the geographic segregation of society which results in many people never encountering the reality of poverty. This division will need to be addressed if we are to build a more integrated and cohesive society. However, it is important to recognise that in recent years public awareness of poverty has grown.

PREREQUISITES FOR ACTION

Opinion polls have shown that, along with unemployment, emigration and health services, poverty is seen by the electorate as one of the four most important issues to be addressed. There is thus a much stronger base now for a comprehensive assault on poverty.

Civic Leadership

A key to addressing poverty in a comprehensive manner in some European countries and British cities has been strong civic leadership. This has been vital because poverty requires a comprehensive political response. If a comprehensive approach is to be developed in Ireland and if priority is to be given to anti-poverty strategies they will need to be championed by elected politicians at both a national and local level. It will also be important that they are backed by people in positions of influence and authority in key sectors, especially by the Social Partners. It is only in these circumstances that a corporate collective approach to economic and social development with a strong focus on tackling poverty is likely to gain legitimacy and to be sustained. In this regard the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) with its strong emphasis on radical structural reform and increasing social equity and social rights is an encouraging development. However, if the aspirations in PESP are to be made a reality, continuing strong leadership will be necessary.

Particip -ation

Policies and programmes to tackle poverty which take account of the views and experiences of those affected are likely to be more effective than those that do not take on board these views and experiences. Policy makers are removed from the day to day reality of poverty. An understanding of this reality and of how policies actually impact on the ground is a scientific necessity if effective initiatives are to be designed. It is thus important to try and develop structures and ways of working that maximise the participation of those affected by poverty in the design and implementation of solutions at both a national and local level. There is a need to move beyond professional workers speaking for those living in poverty.

PREREQUISITES FOR ACTION

There are now emerging networks of people and groups experiencing poverty such as the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, the National Campaign for the Homeless, the European Anti-Poverty Network and the Forum for People with Disabilities. Ways of involving them more directly in the formulation of policy, for instance in the discussions between the Social Partners and the Government, need to be developed.

Economic Growth

It is clear that economic growth does not of itself solve the problems of poverty and exclusion. It can even create and reinforce some exclusion. In other words, the connection between economic growth and social progress is complex and there are both good and bad consequences. However, as experience in Northern Ireland has demonstrated, it is easier to address severe inequalities and improve access to resources and opportunities when one has a rising economic tide rather than when one is faced by a zero sum game. This does not mean that action to address issues such as poverty and social exclusion should be deferred until there is economic growth. They should go hand in hand. We are unlikely to have a strong economy without a strong society and thus social progress will reinforce economic progress. Overall it is clear that, providing one is aware of and counters its adverse effects, economic growth is likely to be critical in creating the climate and opportunity for a real redistribution of resources and opportunities and for creating much needed new jobs.

3. NATIONAL ACTION

In addressing urban poverty it will be essential to get the balance between local and national (and increasingly EC) action correct and to ensure that the different levels reinforce each other. Too much focus on the local can be dangerous. People are living in areas experiencing multiple-deprivation because of the impact of wider social and economic forces. Addressing such poverty is fundamentally a political problem as it involves changing the way resources and opportunities are allocated. This has to be done at a national level. This is especially true in a country as small and as politically and administratively centralised as Ireland.

While effective action at a local level is a very important element in addressing poverty it has definite limits and can only be effective if the processes which cause exclusion and poverty are addressed on a national level. The Government rightly argues at EC level that the negative factors which result from economic change and progress, such as increased regional disparities, should be compensated for and that the stronger areas should support the weaker in the interest of cohesion. So also, the national Government must ensure that there are effective mechanisms for redistributing resources and the benefits of economic growth to the weaker groups and communities within Ireland. In other words a framework for local action must first be established at a national level. Perhaps the ideal balance is for the national and EC levels to plan, redistribute and support local action and for the local level to act, coordinate and deliver solutions.

Structures for a Comprehen- sive Approach

If political and civic leadership to tackle urban poverty is to be effective at a national level structures will need to be developed which will ensure that there is an all-embracing approach. No one measure will be sufficient but rather there will need to be a linking and fusing of the various different ingredients that are necessary for an overall anti-poverty plan. At present in Ireland we have a very segmented and sectorial approach. There is insufficient focus in many departments and agencies on the issue of poverty and a lack of collective planning between them. There is thus a need to develop, at the heart

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of Government, structures which will ensure that all departments and agencies make tackling poverty a priority and which will coordinate and integrate the efforts of the different parties. A first step could be to require all government departments and agencies to undertake regular social impact studies to see how their actions affect those living in poverty compared to other sections of the community.

Redistribut -ion and Increasing Social Equity

There are no easy solutions. All national policies need to be examined and developed to ensure that they are contributing to making the system more efficient and more equitable. This will mean better directed public policy interventions aimed to benefit those in greatest need rather than just improving the position of those who are already well off.

Increasing equity in the taxation system and improving income maintenance measures to ensure that everyone has an adequate minimum standard of living will be critical. Thus there will be a need to broaden the tax base and develop wealth and property taxes. Measures such as tax reliefs to the better off and one-off tax schemes (e.g. Section 23, Business Expansion Scheme, Temple Bar incentives) which give benefits to those who already have many advantages will need to be reformed.

The allocation of additional resources to enable effective integrated local responses requires a national decision. Resources are necessary if social support systems (e.g. child care provision, playschemes, local advice services, community development projects, local women's projects) are to be strengthened and developed, if physical housing and living conditions are to be improved and if basic services like health, education and training, sport and leisure are to be upgraded.

A Balanced Approach

There are a lot of non-income aspects of poverty. These include bad housing, poor environment, literacy difficulties, low educational achievement, poor health and inadequate transport. Thus there will need to be a balanced approach which looks at the links between these different elements.

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This will be essential to ensure that national resources are allocated effectively and in a reinforcing way between the various areas.

Avoiding Segregation

All national policies need to be considered to establish whether they are facilitating the integration of people experiencing poverty or, often unintentionally, further excluding them. For instance there is an urgent need to move away from a housing policy that concentrates people experiencing poverty and unemployment in certain areas. The destruction of traditional inner city communities and the creation of large one-class public housing estates on the urban periphery must be addressed. Also national policies like the £5,000 grant to first time house buyers, which denuded poor communities of local leadership and further isolated them, must be avoided. In social welfare there is a need to move away from means testing and other elements which tend to stigmatise recipients. There is also a need to look at interactions between social welfare, the labour market and the taxation system to make it easier for people to move from dependence on benefits back into the economic mainstream.

4. INTEGRATED AREA-BASED ACTION

The concentration of poverty in certain communities strongly suggests that at least part of the solution to urban poverty must be focused on these areas. It is also at the local level that resources and services are actually delivered to people. If more effective support and development systems are to be established they must be close to those affected and as responsive as possible to their views and needs. Several elements stand out as being key to effective local action.

A Holistic Approach

The multi-dimensional nature of poverty means that local responses should address the many different facets of the problem in a comprehensive and integrated manner. One of the key lessons to emerge from EC Poverty Programmes and from other initiatives to rejuvenate marginalised communities in the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe is that there must be a holistic, people-centred approach to development. In disadvantaged communities it is not enough to concentrate on one aspect of development (e.g. the economic) in isolation from others. The interdependence of social, cultural, recreational, environmental, economic and other factors must be recognised. By integrating development across a range of activities the benefits will be reinforcing and the result much greater than the sum of its parts. This has long been understood and accepted by community groups who have adopted a holistic approach to the needs of individuals and their area. However, the sectorial nature of public service provision has meant that services are still often delivered in a very fragmented and piecemeal fashion.

A Planned Approach

Implicit in a holistic approach to development is the belief that there should be a coherent, planned and coordinated approach to development. This should involve identifying the problems of an area and the resources available (both internal and external) to tackle them, drawing up an agreed programme of action with clear objectives and then ensuring that all the different agencies (public, private, voluntary and community) work together to achieve them.

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Partnership If a holistic and planned approach is to be achieved it implies that there will be a partnership between the various actors involved. This has certainly been a central feature of successful initiatives in other countries and is now a core element of the EC Poverty 3 Programme and the PESP Area-Based Response to Long-term Unemployment. However, the concept of locally based partnerships runs counter to the political and administrative tradition in Ireland. Experience, such as the COMTEC initiative, has shown the difficulties inherent in trying to establish such structures in an unreformed administrative system. It is foreign to our culture and to our institutions such as churches, schools and the political system. Present policy making procedures and agencies are not used to or geared for the participation of the people or communities affected by their decisions. Furthermore, central and local authorities are not used to consulting and cooperating even with their colleagues in other relevant departments.

In spite of the difficulties, the advantages of a partnership approach have begun to emerge in initiatives such as the Tallaght Partnership and the Ballymun Task Force. The experience of the Second EC Poverty Programme in Ireland during the 1980s clearly highlighted the need to build local partnerships to ensure a more comprehensive approach to tackling poverty.

The advantage of bringing together the public, private and community sectors in partnerships is that they can identify and prioritise needs in a more effective way and then pool their different expertise and resources to respond in a more efficient and coordinated fashion than heretofore. For community groups it offers the opportunity to move from what has often been a confrontational approach with the state to a situation where they become part of the planning and decision making process.

It is clear from the experience in the UK and the rest of the EC and indeed from within Ireland, both North and South, that if local partnerships are to be effective several factors need to be taken into account and several barriers overcome. Key ingredients in successful partnerships include the following:-

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Allowing Time: It takes time to build effective partnerships. The different sectors come from very different work cultures and bring to partnerships very different skills, resources and objectives. These cannot be meshed together overnight. Indeed there is a danger - that if there is too much pressure to show results too quickly and if not enough time is given to the process of building partnerships - that the whole process can be undermined. It is also important that people recognise the magnitude of the problems they are addressing and that these will not be solved overnight. It is a long-term process and partnerships need to recognise this and develop both realistic short and long-term goals.

Building Trust and Understanding: Given the different backgrounds of the participants it is very important to consciously build up trust and respect for each other's skills and viewpoints. This involves moving from a confrontational position to one in which respect for diversity and difference is uppermost. A considerable amount of learning has to go on. For instance representatives from the statutory sector and the social partners need to learn more about the reality of poverty from the community representatives. There also needs to be an openness to constructive criticism and to taking on lessons from work and to changing programmes as appropriate.

Developing Common Goals: A key element in building trust is the identification of and agreement on some common goals. Unless there are clear and shared objectives there is little reason for people to participate in partnerships. It is worth taking time to work these out with some clarity as the process can do much to fuse the diverse elements together. This can then lead on to a process of joint planning.

Promoting Equality: If partnerships are to work there must be a genuine equality between the different participants. This will not happen automatically. People bring different levels of skill, information, knowledge and resources to meetings. Often the community element can feel disadvantaged and lacking in power and resources to meetings. Effective partnership often involves some of the participants giving up or

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sharing some of the power and resources they control.

Participative Decision Making: It is important to develop participative ways of working. There is always a risk that decisions get made by a small group. At first this can seem efficient as it can produce quick results. However, if some people are regularly excluded from this process they will not feel full partners. If there is a process of joint planning this risk can be avoided. One of the barriers to this is if representatives of statutory agencies do not have the authority to commit their agency to an agreed line of action. There thus needs to be a strong commitment not just of individual representatives but of whole agencies to supporting a partnership approach.

Sharing Control of Resources: Implicit in the concept of partnership is some joint control over the allocation of resources. It implies more than just coordinating existing resources. If partnerships are to be meaningful they must involve some collective agreement on priorities and the allocation of resources to meet them. This will clearly present a major challenge to some agencies to do things differently. It will mean overcoming bureaucratic and institutional inertia. Very hierarchical structures will have to be changed and more local decision making encouraged. This will be necessary if agencies are to allow others to share in the control and allocation of their resources. In addition to joint control over existing resources, providing new resources which are directly in the control of partnerships will greatly increase their credibility and ability to deliver locally.

Developing Flexible Structures: Given the complexity of local partnerships and the variation between different areas it is important that structures are developed which suit local circumstances. There can be a danger of imposing a model of partnership from the centre which does not sufficiently take account of local realities. Furthermore local structures need to be flexible and open to ensure that they can take account of changing local circumstances. In particular structures need to be developed which will ensure

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that there is a regular flow of information back to the local community. It is important that community representatives on partnerships do not become isolated from the community. They should be a link point. Also partnerships should strive to create mechanisms which will foster the maximum involvement of the local community at all levels of their work. Provision for this could be built into a Partnership's Constitution as Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Effective Leadership: Bringing and keeping together the diverse elements that form a partnership can gain significantly from sensitive and effective leadership. The public support of local political leaders, key figures in industry and the trade unions, senior local officials and local church, community and voluntary leaders can help to establish the credibility of a partnership. Of particular importance are the roles of the chairperson and project leader. They require skills in coalition building. This involves great sensitivity and an ability to listen, to build consensus and to promote communication and a common sense of purpose between all the different elements of a partnership. Because of the limited experience of partnership building in Ireland support and advice in performing these roles will be very important. Some of the U.S. experience of coalition building could be relevant in this regard. It will also be helpful if chairpersons and project leaders of partnerships meet regularly and learn from each other's experiences.

Training: The skills and knowledge necessary to make partnerships work are something that can be learned. It is thus very useful to provide training for all the different partners in the partnership process. Often an external facilitator can help people to understand the process better, facilitate communication between the different players and develop skills of negotiation, joint planning and consensus building. There is a growing body of experience about what makes partnerships work and what are the difficulties and blocks that have to be overcome. It is important that this should be documented and made available to participants.

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Community Development and Community Involvement

At the heart of successful integrated area based approaches is an emphasis on the involvement of those directly affected by urban poverty. It is essentially about building from the bottom up (rather than from the top down). It aims at the active participation of local people in the planning, management and implementation of development. It thus involves the development of people's skills, the encouragement of self-help and the creation of structures that maximise community involvement and control.

It is clear that at present many communities lack the structures, skills and resources necessary to allow their full participation in partnerships. It is very difficult for people who have been marginalised for years to suddenly move to the centre of the development process. It is thus very important to support and fund, on an ongoing basis, local community development initiatives that will empower people and facilitate their full involvement in the development process. Effective local community development is an essential element in successful area-based initiatives.

The PESP area-based initiative stresses that local partnerships should be community-led. However, this is difficult to achieve unless there is a strong network of local groups which community representatives can link back to and be accountable to on a regular basis. Sometimes there is a lack of communication between groups in an area and this can hinder the development of a united approach. Community involvement in partnerships also involves a considerable commitment in terms of time and resources. This is something that needs to be taken into account. Training also needs to be provided to community representatives to equip them with the skills and information necessary to participate as equals with the representatives of other sectors.

Experience from Europe suggests that, if community development is to flourish, statutory agencies need to develop an openness and commitment to supporting and encouraging real community involvement. In the Irish context there has often been suspicion between local communities and statutory agencies and there has been a reluctance to give local communities real

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power or resources. The proposed government charter on relationships between the statutory and voluntary sector could usefully create a basis for a more equal relationship. It could also give local communities a greater say in the planning and delivery of services to ensure that they are provided in ways that emphasise courtesy, dignity and respect.

On a positive note it is clear that many local communities already have considerable positive elements on which to build. The resilience of local people has been demonstrated through projects like local women's groups. It is important to build on these efforts and to encourage local projects which will foster the personal development of people, liberate their creativity and energy, promote collective responses to local problems and develop local leadership. Thus as well as local women's groups, literacy schemes and other basic education initiatives, community arts projects which celebrate identity and heritage and many other initiatives should be supported.

Decentralisation of Decision Making

One of the main barriers to effective local partnerships is the very centralised administrative and political system in Ireland. This inhibits inter-agency cooperation, stifles local initiative and leads to a very fragmented and sectorial approach. Effective area-based initiatives in the United Kingdom and in other parts of the EC have often been undertaken in the context of strong local authorities. These can provide the resources and coordination of services necessary for effective area based initiatives. Thus the move towards effective local integrated action in Ireland would be greatly enhanced by devolving more centralised state power to strong local structures. This suggests that reform of local government should be the goal of those developing area based partnerships.

5. MEASURES TO TACKLE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

While the conference did not specifically concentrate on the issue of unemployment it was seen as a key element in urban poverty. In view of the multi-dimensional nature of poverty several speakers warned against treating unemployment as something completely separate. This is particularly relevant in view of the concentration of the unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed, in the more marginalised communities. An integrated area-based response to unemployment is an important element in an overall strategy. However, some warned that the PESP area-based initiative, by concentrating only on the long-term unemployed, could take too narrow an approach and that this would need to be broadened out to encompass the economic, social and cultural development of disadvantaged communities as a whole. It was also repeatedly stressed that responsibility for creating more jobs must be at a national level. For instance some stressed the need for an active labour market policy which would increase demand by providing subsidies and incentives. Overall there must be a balance between local and national initiatives.

In general there was a feeling that there needs to be a much greater coordination of policies in the area of long-term unemployment. Cooperation between agencies needs to be increased and partnership should become a policy issue. At present there is a lack of coordination and even data is collected on a different basis by different agencies. This makes it very difficult to build up a comprehensive overview of needs in a particular area. At the same time policy must not be restricted to those on the live register as others, such as women who are receiving adult dependant payments, face the same obstacles.

While some people were very pessimistic about creating more jobs and talked about the need to redefine the nature of work and introduce basic income schemes this was strongly rejected by others. It was stressed that unemployment is not automatic and that Ireland is exceptional in having such high levels. It was also emphasised that those experiencing unemployment want the same as those in employment: jobs, houses, safe streets, schools and so on. Overall a range of very practical insights and ideas in relation to unemployment did emerge.

MEASURES TO TACKLE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

Exclusion from the Labour Market

Peter Robinson, economic consultant to the Campaign for Work, quoted research which cast doubt on those who explain long-term unemployment as a result of people giving up, becoming demotivated and losing skills. His research showed that most unemployed people, even after the worst experience, continued to search actively for work each week. It is clear that it is the employers not the unemployed who decide who gets jobs. The strategies they use to recruit tend to exclude the long-term unemployed. Many use informal networks and people living in areas of very high unemployment are excluded from them. About a third automatically reject any applications from the long-term unemployed. This experience has certainly been echoed by the long-term unemployed in Ireland. They have very difficult access to the labour market and often feel stigmatised. Their address alone can be enough to rule them out of consideration.

Limits of Local Job Creation

While concentrations of unemployment occur in particular communities strategies which then focus on creating jobs in those areas tend to have very limited success. Certainly the experience of community enterprise initiatives in Ireland in disadvantaged urban communities is of quite limited and small scale success. There is significant evidence in the United Kingdom that when jobs are created in a specific area the majority go to people from outside the area. This can be for a number of reasons: first, because people who are relocating bring workers with them; secondly, because informal networks are used to recruit people; thirdly, because people in the local community do not have the appropriate skills with employers placing heavy emphasis on personal attributes which are class-based as well as on technical skills; and fourthly because of discrimination on grounds of colour, ethnic origin or age.

It is clear from the above that it doesn't make sense to concentrate all efforts on finding jobs in the immediate local area. Thus there is a need to open up job opportunities and travel to work areas for residents of disadvantaged communities across the whole metropolitan area.

MEASURES TO TACKLE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

This can often best be done by community employment agencies based in the areas where long-term unemployment is concentrated. They can identify opportunities and are readily accessible to people who are unemployed. This has been borne out by the experience of the Ballymun Job Centre.

Improving Access to Jobs

Special measures are needed to improve the access of the long-term unemployed to jobs. Experience from other countries has shown that high quality placement and counselling is the most effective intervention. This needs to be backed by encouragement for employers to use more formal recruitment procedures and measures to counter discrimination. In this regard the involvement of employers in initiatives to address long-term unemployment is especially important. They can become involved in developing compacts where employers give a commitment to take on or at least to interview people who successfully complete training courses. Training can be important providing that it contains high levels of skill inputs and is matched as far as possible to skill shortages in the surrounding labour market so that people have a real chance of getting work after training programmes. However, temporary employment schemes that lack a major training component, tend to be of limited value in increasing people's access to jobs.

Progression and Variety

It is important to avoid stereotyping the long term unemployed. They have a wide variety of educational and training needs. Not all the unemployed need the same degree of support or assistance to get back into employment. Some need relatively little help while others face more complex pressures and difficulties, disincentives and discrimination within the labour market. Thus responses need to be open, flexible and voluntary. They should allow for differences between individuals and local areas. They should also take account of the needs of particular groups such as Travellers or people with disabilities or lone parents with children.

MEASURES TO TACKLE LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

Also the unemployed should be involved as far as possible in the planning and design of responses. In this regard the concept of open learning centres where individuals and groups can come and negotiate education programmes relevant to their needs and circumstances seems appropriate.

John Benington of the Local Government Centre at the University of Warwick pointed out that the First and Second EC Poverty Programmes identified six different local strategies for dealing with unemployment: group support, solidarity and counselling; training in skills for employment; provision of work experience in socially useful employment; job creation; economic development; and campaigning. What appears to be important is that people have an opportunity to get the support appropriate to their situation and to be able to progress with a real prospect of a job at the end of the day.

APPENDIX I CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

- 10.00am **Opening Address**
Bertie Ahern TD, Minister for Labour
- The Nature of Urban Poverty**
David Donnison, Professor of Town and Regional Planning, Glasgow University
Chair: Gerry Flynn, Chairperson, Combat Poverty Agency
- 11.30am **Learning from the European Experience**
John Benington, Director, The Local Government Centre, University of Warwick
Peter Robinson, Economic Consultant, Campaign for Work, London.
Chair: Joyce O'Connor, Chairperson, PAUL Project, Limerick.
- 2.00pm **Irish Perspectives**
Anna Lee, Project Leader, West Tallaght Resource Centre.
Paul Sweeney, Director, Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust.
Tony McCashin, Policy Analyst, National Economic and Social Council
Jack Higgins, City Manager, Limerick County Borough Council.
Chair: Liam Connellan, Director General, Confederation of Irish Industry
- 3.00pm **Workshops**
1. **Key elements in a strategy to tackle long-term unemployment**
Chair: Tom Costello, Director of Manpower Services, FAS
Rapporteur: Larry Bond, Combat Poverty Agency
 2. **Organising effective partnerships**
Chair: Michael Mernagh, South Inner City Community Development Association
Rapporteur: Cris Mulvey, Freelance Consultant
 3. **The need for a community development approach**
Chair: Mary Whelan, Director, Community Action Network.
Rapporteur: June Meehan, Combat Poverty Agency

APPENDIX I CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

4. Barriers to integrated development
Chair: Michael Bannon, Director, Services
Industry Research Centre, University College
Dublin.
Rapporteur: Noreen Kavanagh, Freelance Consultant
5. The limits of local action
Chair: Kieran McKeown, Research Consultant
Rapporteur: Margaret Barry, Combat Poverty
Agency.
6. No economic development without social
development
Chair: Eithne Fitzgerald, Economist
Rapporteur: Brid McGrath, Librarian, Combat
Poverty Agency.

- 4.15pm Strategies for the 90's
Panel: David Donnison, John Benington, Peter
Robinson
Chair: Peter Cassells, General Secretary, Irish
Congress of Trade Unions.
- 4.45pm Conclusions
Hugh Frazer, Director, Combat Poverty Agency.

