

Poverty and Equality
or Ten reasons why anyone who wants to Combat Poverty
should Embrace Equality as well

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The problem

Many people believe that there is an important distinction between being against poverty and being in favour of equality. They believe that the alleviation of poverty is a more limited, attainable, justifiable and urgent aim than the promotion of equality. The two aims are not necessarily considered incompatible, but equality is seen as a secondary, remote and utopian project which can distract us from the serious business of eliminating poverty.

My aim in this paper is to argue that there is no such need to distinguish between these two goals: that anyone serious about eliminating poverty should pursue a more ambitious egalitarian agenda. The first step is to say something very briefly about the concepts of poverty and equality. I will then put forward ten arguments to show that anyone who wants to combat poverty should endorse equality as well.¹ I do not imagine that I will be saying anything new, and in fact several of the arguments below occur in *Rich and Poor* (Cantillon, Corrigan, Kirby and O'Flynn 2001), but I hope that bringing the arguments together will serve a useful purpose.

Conceptual preliminaries

Although there is a well-known debate about the concept of poverty, we are in the relatively fortunate position here in Ireland of having a broad consensus on its definition. The consensus is expressed in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) like this:

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 which 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 which are considered the norm for other people in society. (Government of Ireland 1997, 3)

That is the definition I shall employ for the rest of this paper, although I will return to its critics before ending.

There is an equally extensive literature on the definition of equality, but no similar consensus in Ireland or elsewhere. This is not the occasion to delve into the problems. I shall simply say that, in my view, equality has a number of inter-related but conceptually distinct dimensions. Quite how to characterise these is open to question and probably varies according to one's purposes, but for this paper I want to distinguish five key dimensions of equality. They have to do with:

¹ This paper is part of continuing collaborative research in the Equality Studies Centre and draws in particular on Lynch, Baker and Cantillon 2000 and 2001.

1. the egalitarian distribution of resources;
2. equality of opportunity;
3. equal respect and recognition;
4. equality in power relations; and
5. equality in relations of care, love and solidarity.

Let me say a little about each of these in turn (for fuller, similar presentations, see Baker 1998, 2000; Lynch, Baker and Cantillon 2001). The first idea is the egalitarian distribution of resources, or what might (with some reservations) be called 'economic' equality. Economic equality is difficult to characterise. For a start, resources surely include not just income and wealth, but also access to public services (as the second theme of this conference emphasises). Moreover, an egalitarian distribution is not necessarily a strictly equal distribution. Everyone recognises that equality must pay attention to differences in need, implying that some people ought to have more resources than others. In addition, I would argue that an egalitarian distribution must also be sensitive to differences in work, so that people who work longer or harder are entitled to higher incomes, provided that these income differences do no more than compensate them for the extra burdens they have taken on. Regardless of these complications, I think we can continue to assume that an egalitarian distribution of resources would involve a much more equal distribution of income, wealth and access to public services than we have at the moment. The economic inequalities in Irish society at large—the inequalities found in this room—are unjust. That is the central idea to hang onto for what follows.

Equal opportunity has a number of interpretations. Its most basic meaning is non-discrimination. If you've been barred from a pub because you're a Traveller, you've been denied equal opportunity in this first sense. A stronger idea, which the philosopher John Rawls calls 'fair equality of opportunity', is the principle that people should not be advantaged or hurt by their social background, and that their prospects in life should depend entirely on their own effort and abilities (Rawls 1971, 73). If you got a better education and ended up in a better job than other people because you came from a well-off family, you have benefited from inequality of opportunity in this second sense. A still stronger view, which might be called equality of *real* options or *real* choices, means enabling everyone to develop their talents and abilities, and providing everyone with a real choice among activities that they find satisfying or fulfilling, including a range of combinations of paid and unpaid work. If you find yourself stuck in a meaningless, tedious job, you know what inequality of opportunity in this third sense involves. I will be referring to all three interpretations of equal opportunity below.

The idea of equal respect and recognition might also be called 'cultural' equality or, more explicitly, 'critical inter-culturalism'. It is the principle that we should celebrate individual and cultural differences while at the same time engaging critically with others in an open and dialogical spirit, recognising that both our own cultural assumptions and those of others are open to challenge. The person who openly despises Jews or Muslims is reinforcing cultural inequality. But so, too, are upstanding, middle class people who are smugly superior about their own world view.

Equality of power—'political' equality—is a principle of radical democracy in all areas of society. It means, first of all, the promotion of a stronger, more participatory form of politics in which ordinary citizens, and particularly groups who have been excluded

from power altogether, can have more control over decision-making. Secondly, it means challenging power in other areas, such as the economy, the family, education and religion. The wife who resists a domineering husband, the child who resists an authoritarian teacher, and the worker who resists the dictates of management are all part of the struggle for equality of power.

A final key dimension of equality has to do with relations of love, care and solidarity. This idea of 'affective' equality has not been thoroughly explored by egalitarian theorists, but it is a dimension that we in the Equality Studies Centre think should be given more attention. For surely such relations matter profoundly to both individuals and society generally. And so if our society systematically makes it harder for some people to engage in relations of love, care and solidarity than for others, that is a matter of social justice that ought to concern us. Because this aspect of equality has received little attention, I do not have much to say about it below, although there are some tentative remarks. (For further discussion, see Lynch, Baker and Cantillon 2001.)

Having spelled out these five key dimensions of equality, the aim of this paper can be expressed more precisely. It is to show that even if our primary aim is to eliminate poverty, we will achieve this better if we also work for real equality of opportunity, and for full economic, cultural, political and affective equality.² Here are some of the reasons why.

Dimensions of Equality: Summary
The egalitarian distribution of resources
Equality of opportunity
Non-discrimination
'Fair' equal opportunity
Equality of real options
Equal respect and recognition
Equality in power relations
Equality in relations of care, love and solidarity

² The five key dimensions of equality can generate a more general statement of the problem with which we started. Within each dimension, it is natural to distinguish what might be considered a minimum standard of provision from the idea of full equality. And it might be said that it is surely more urgent, attainable and justifiable to ensure that everyone reaches these minimum standards in their lives than to achieve full equality. The argument below could be adapted to answer this generalised view, by claiming that even if our primary aim is to ensure the minimum, we achieve this better by aiming at equality as well. But to do so would make for a more complicated and less accessible paper.

Connecting poverty and equality

Reason 1: Relieving poverty is intrinsically redistributive.

The first and most obvious connection between poverty and equality is that allocating resources to the relief of poverty necessarily means that poor people get more, and better-off people less, than would otherwise be the case. We should not think of this as *taking* from the privileged some resources which are rightfully theirs and *giving* them to the poor, since that implies that the privileged are entitled to those resources in the first place. But we should recognise that every anti-poverty action necessarily entails a greater equality of resources than would have occurred otherwise. To this extent, it is conceptually impossible to distinguish relieving poverty from promoting equality. At a national level, it is clear that the elimination of poverty would involve a very substantial increase in resources for, say, the poorest 20% of the population, with correspondingly lower resources for the privileged. If we widen our vision to a global context, it is easy to see that the relief of world poverty would entail a massive increase in the resources of the poor—resources which would otherwise be appropriated by the well-off.

Although this argument is important, it has a limited reach. It certainly shows that relieving poverty right away—this week, this year—would require a much more equal distribution of resources. But it does not refute the claim that economic growth allows us to eliminate poverty over time without reducing inequality. To do so, we need to move to additional arguments.

Reason 2: The 'poverty line' is a function of the overall inequality in society.

A second connection between poverty and equality has to do with the way poverty has been defined: in terms of the resources necessary for 'a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally' and for 'participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society'. These very phrases suggest that poverty is a matter of distance from the average standard of living in society, even if it is not quite so simple as calculating straight percentages of income. It follows that there is a broad convergence between promoting equality and eliminating poverty, since both policies involve the narrowing of the gap between the worst off and the average. But this reason, like the first, is so obvious as to be relatively trivial. The other reasons are less so.

Reason 3: Equal opportunity improves the prospects for working a way out of poverty.

It is taken for granted in anti-poverty circles that for most people the best route out of poverty is through paid work. However much we may try to ensure that unemployment benefits or their equivalent, such as a guaranteed Basic Income, are themselves sufficient to lift people out of poverty, they seem at best to promise a meagre standard of living that is at the margins of poverty. But poor people cannot work their way out of poverty unless they have the opportunities to do so. Those opportunities include both education and training, on the one hand, and prospects for employment on the other. To be sure, a certain amount can be accomplished in this regard without opportunities being anything like equal. Poor people can be discriminated against; their schools and training facilities can be inferior; their prospects for decent and satisfying work can be far worse—all that is consistent with some movement from welfare to work, as American experience in particular has clearly taught us.

But the greater the equality of opportunity, in all three of its meanings, the more likely it is that poor people will enter the workforce in a way that operates effectively against poverty in the long run. This is first of all a matter of equal access to work, since discrimination still operates against poor people seeking employment, and there is nothing in our equality legislation which prohibits an employer from discriminating against someone because of their class background. It is secondly about fair equal opportunities for education, since the marginal, low-skilled jobs available to people with limited educational credentials are precisely those least likely to lift anyone out of poverty and most vulnerable to an economic downturn. It is, thirdly, about equality of real occupational choice, since it is obviously less reasonable to expect people to take up low-skilled, tedious jobs than highly skilled, satisfying work.

Another connection between poverty and equal opportunity is more political. The greater the degree of equal opportunity, the more likely it is that people from poor backgrounds will come to occupy positions in which they can significantly influence public policy. Not all of them will choose to influence it in a progressive manner, but it stands to reason that the greater the representation of people from poor backgrounds in the privileged sectors of society, the more attention will be given to the problems of poverty.

It follows that the relief of poverty, and in particular the effectiveness of work-to-welfare, depends on the degree to which we can achieve equal opportunity, with each form of equal opportunity adding to the prospects of success.

Reason 4: Equal opportunity depends on economic, cultural, political and affective equality.

If the relief of poverty depends on equality of opportunity, we need to ask what equal opportunity itself depends on. Like the distinction between poverty and equality, it is common enough to distinguish between equality of opportunity and what is sometimes called equality of outcome, and to prioritise the one over the other. But in this case, the interdependence is even more striking. It is abundantly clear to any careful observer that we will never have equal opportunity until we have a society which is much more equal economically, culturally, politically and affectively. One reason for this is that the economically and culturally privileged will always find ways of advantaging their children in an unequal society. Whether it is through fee-paying schools, or the purchase of educational extras on the private market, or the direct transfer of academic skills within the family, or the provision of foreign travel, or networks of contacts in the economy, or any of the other advantages that privileged people are capable of passing on to their children, it is clear that equal opportunity is a myth in a context of massive inequality. It is, no doubt, a very useful myth—for those of us who are privileged! It means, for example, that we can use the points system to pretend that our children deserve their places in higher education, and we can use the idea of merit to pretend that they deserve their high-paying jobs.

I am not blaming individual privileged people for their energetic defence of unequal opportunities. It is a perfectly rational strategy in an unequal society. After all, social mobility up entails social mobility down. And which of us, rich or poor, would voluntarily expose our children to the risk of poverty? This is, in my view, the less obvious reason why equal opportunity is a myth in our kind of society: because inequality itself gives privileged people a compelling reason for ensuring that their own

children have as great a prospect of success in life as they can possibly arrange. Inequality provides both the motive and the means for the privileged to sustain inequality of opportunity. It is no wonder that we use our economic, cultural and political advantages do just that.

So far I have said little about affective equality, partly because we are far less familiar with the patterns of inequality in this dimension. But we can surely say this much: that inequalities in people's access to relations of love, care and solidarity have got to have implications for their prospects of overall success in life. If we want equal opportunity in any robust form, we need also to pay attention to those affective inequalities which stand in its way.

If the relief of poverty requires greater equality of opportunity, and if greater equality of opportunity requires greater economic, cultural, political and affective equality, then the relief of poverty requires these as well. That is the fourth connection between poverty and equality.

Reason 5: The prospect of effective anti-poverty measures depends on greater equality of power.

Independently of the argument we have just considered, it is clear that inequalities of power play a crucial role in perpetuating poverty. At one level, this is as simple as the fact that the poor have much less influence on government than the rich. They are neither a cohesive nor effective political force and have none of the bargaining power of the privileged in their dealings with the state. But as I pointed out earlier, powerlessness goes beyond the realm of formal politics. It appears in the legal system, where the poor face greater risks of imprisonment and its consequences for continuing poverty. It appears in the welfare system, where bureaucratic power sometimes seems to be as dedicated to reinforcing poverty as to relieving it. It appears in the workplace, where the power of employers operates to keep people in low-paid, dead-end, dangerous jobs. It appears in the educational system, where power operates to sustain the class structure of society. It appears in the family, where the power of men over women and of parents over children can sometimes work in a way that deepens the poverty of both women and children.

It follows that if we are serious about the relief of poverty, we have to be serious about empowering poor people—about fighting the inequalities of power which operate to keep poor people in their place.

Reason 6: The prospect of effective poverty relief depends on greater equality of respect and recognition.

The sixth connection between poverty and equality parallels and interacts with the issue of power. In our society, the lack of respect and recognition that the privileged have for the poor has many facets. One is stereotyping, the belief that the poor have certain common, negative characteristics like laziness and lack of self-discipline. Another is cultural imperialism, the belief that the values and understandings of the privileged are right for everyone, and that such different values and understandings as are held by working class people, by Travellers, by immigrants, by gays and lesbians, by disabled people—by anyone who is 'different'—are to be disparaged, and educated out of them. A third facet is invisibility, the tendency of the privileged to act as though poor people

simply do not exist, aided and abetted by isolating them geographically and ignoring them in the mass media. A fourth facet is internalised oppression, a lack of self respect and a feeling of isolation, alienation and uselessness among poor people themselves (Young 1990; O'Neill 1992).

It is easy to see that such cultural inequality operates to perpetuate and reinforce poverty. If the privileged cannot even see the poor, or if when they do see them can only despise and pity them, what chance is there that the voices of the poor will be heard, and heard accurately, by those in power? If poor people are treated as second class citizens and are stereotyped and disparaged, what chance is there that they will be permitted to participate in the activities which others take for granted? If they are alienated from society, blame themselves for their condition and feel powerless to change it, what chance is there of any change at all? Without greater cultural equality, the prospects of a serious assault on poverty are bound to be weak. Thus the struggle against poverty has to be linked to the struggle for equal respect and recognition—for the acceptance and valuing of difference.

Reason 7: The more people care about equality, the more will be done to eliminate poverty. And the more unequal our society, the less people will care about either poverty or equality.

A seventh set of connections between poverty and equality operates through people's commitments and motivations. It is a truism that reality usually falls short of expectations—that whatever we aim for, we are likely to achieve less. It follows that if we aim only at the relief of poverty, rather than at the more demanding goal of equality, we are likely to be less successful in achieving that very objective. If poverty relief alone is our goal, we are likely to be pretty happy about cutting the number of 'consistently poor' people in half. But if equality is our goal, that target is going to look like a rather feeble first step.

A related reason for caring about equality and not just poverty is that our efforts are less likely to be sapped by disputes about what counts as poverty (Dworkin 2000, 3). If poverty relief is our goal, then the definition of poverty is obviously a crucial concern. Governments will try to look good by defining poverty in a restricted way, while their critics will go for a more expansive definition. We see that process at work right now in the debates about the NAPS. Of course, similar conflicts occur over the definition of equality, but they concern a higher target. Aiming at equality shifts the whole policy space upwards, in a way that is bound to be helpful to the poor.

A third aspect of this set of relationships has to do with the conditions for social solidarity. There is of course no simple relationship between public sentiment and social realities, but it stands to reason that the greater the degree of inequality in a society, the less the privileged are likely to care about either poverty or inequality. This is partly because such concerns raise serious doubts about the legitimacy of privilege, and so are deeply uncomfortable for privileged people to entertain. It is also a function of social distance and segregation, making it easier for poor people to be stereotyped and disparaged. Government policies which increase inequality, such as cutting the higher rate of income tax and reducing capital gains tax, strengthen the assumption that the privileged have no serious obligations to their fellow citizens—that the state has no right to transfer 'their' money to the poor. By contrast, an egalitarian society which is proud of its egalitarianism, in which political discourse taps into and fosters feelings of

interdependence and solidarity, would sustain support for the elimination of poverty and the promotion of equality.

It follows that a society which wants to eliminate poverty will do a better job at doing so if it has a strong commitment to a wider egalitarian agenda, and that that commitment will itself be stronger in a more egalitarian society.

Reason 8: If poverty relief depends on growth, then it depends on greater equality.

It is widely believed that the relief of poverty depends on economic growth. Whether that belief is justified is open to question, for various reasons. One problem is that economic growth can merely shift the 'poverty line' upwards, because it changes what is considered an acceptable standard of living. Another is that growth carries its own negative effects, such as environmental degradation and new forms of stress. But it is plausible to suppose that growth in some sense—particularly in the sense of increased productivity—can be helpful in relieving poverty. The question then arises of the relationship between growth and equality. For a long time it was assumed by economists that growth depended on *inequality*. They assumed, for example, that inequality was necessary to provide the incentive for investment, technical innovation and hard work. There is now a growing body of evidence for alternative views: that economic growth is fostered by equality, or at least that growth relieves poverty more effectively in more equal societies (Kirby 2001: 20-21). The reasons for these associations are no doubt complex, and open to debate. But if the relief of poverty does depend on growth, and if poverty-relieving growth does depend on greater equality, then there is an eighth connection between poverty and equality.

Reason 9: If the prospects for growth are limited, then poverty can only be relieved by greater equality

Let us now consider the possibility that we are coming up against the limits to economic growth. These limits are most strongly evident in environmental constraints: in the depletion of fossil fuels, the problem of global warming, the dangers of nuclear power, the crisis in industrial agriculture, and so on. In a no-growth economy, we have to give up the belief that growth itself will eliminate poverty, that a rising tide will lift all boats (Cohen 1995, 9-12). There is then no alternative to redistribution—to pursuing greater equality. The eighth and ninth reasons together seem to cover all the options. If growth is possible, and necessary for poverty relief, then we need greater equality. If growth is either impossible or unnecessary for poverty relief, then we need greater equality.

Reason 10: The central arguments for eliminating poverty are arguments for equality.

We come now to my last connection between poverty and equality. It is that the very reasons we might have for eliminating poverty are reasons for pursuing a more radical agenda of equality. Why, after all, should we care about poverty? Because we recognise the value of every human being. Because we think that every person is entitled to a decent life. Because we feel compassion for, and solidarity with, others in need. But why should we limit these concerns to the elimination of poverty? Why should our empathy with others stop at the poverty line? Why should we think that the mere escape from poverty is enough of an aim for anyone's life? Is it enough for your own life, or for your own children's lives?

Of course the ending of poverty is a worthwhile aim, and an urgent one. But if the moral basis of resistance to poverty lies in the equal value of every human being and in our complex interconnections, then we have to recognise that this reasoning goes beyond the anti-poverty principle. It provides a basis for the stronger aim of equality.

Poverty and Equality: Summary

1. Relieving poverty is intrinsically redistributive.
2. The 'poverty line' is a function of the overall inequality in society.
3. Equal opportunity improves the prospects for working a way out of poverty.
4. Equal opportunity depends on economic, cultural, political and affective equality.
5. The prospect of effective anti-poverty measures depends on greater equality of power.
6. The prospect of effective poverty relief depends on greater equality of respect and recognition.
7. The more people care about equality, the more will be done to eliminate poverty. And the more unequal our society, the less people will care about either poverty or equality.
8. If poverty relief depends on growth, then it depends on greater equality.
9. If the prospects for growth are limited, then poverty can only be relieved by greater equality.
10. The central arguments for eliminating poverty are arguments for equality.

Counter-arguments

Ten is a nice round number, enough to be getting on with. If what I've said is even half right, there are plenty of reasons for agreeing that the relief of poverty and the promotion of equality are intimately connected. But if the arguments I have set out are familiar, so are some objections to them. Among these possible objections, I want to single out three.

Objection 1: 'Poverty isn't socially relative.'

The first objection is that the consensus definition of poverty is mistaken. Poverty is not a matter of what a society regards as acceptable and normal, but of basic, universal needs. On that account of so-called 'absolute' poverty, we can easily relieve poverty without any great commitment to equality.

This objection would work against my second reason for linking poverty and equality, but would have little impact on the others. It remains the case that a serious commitment to the relief of even 'absolute' poverty on a world scale would involve a

massive allocation of resources to the poor. More importantly, all the other reasons for connecting the relief of poverty to greater equality of opportunity and to greater economic, cultural, political and affective equality remain valid. So even if we were to concede the distinction between 'relative' and 'absolute' poverty—which we should not—it would have little impact on the argument.

Objection 2: 'Experience shows that we can reduce poverty amidst increasing inequality.'

What may seem the easiest reply to my arguments is that however plausible they sound, they are refuted by the facts. In particular, we have in recent years witnessed both a decrease in Irish poverty and an increase in Irish inequality.

Part of the difficulty with this argument is that it depends again on the concept of poverty. Poverty has been going down according to the definition adopted by the NAPS global target, which includes 'basic deprivation', but it has been going up according to a simpler 'relative income' definition of poverty (Layte et al 2000). One of the questions which has already arisen in response to these facts is whether the list of basic deprivation indicators needs to be revised so that it continues to capture the agreed concept of poverty. But this is a familiar dispute. The other issues raised above are harder to sort out.

One aspect of the problem concerns the choice between relieving poverty now and postponing this till later. Even if it is true that economic growth has led to less poverty than we had in, say, 1971, that is not much solace to the people who were poor in 1971, half of whom are probably dead now. Poverty relief without redistribution is a delaying tactic that protects the rich at the expense of the poor.

Another consideration is that although Irish incomes have become more unequal (Nolan et al 2000), there has arguably been a decline in some other key inequalities. Most importantly, it can be argued that the development of social partnership and the inclusion of the community pillar in national negotiations have been small but real advances in political equality that have helped to counterbalance increased economic inequality. In addition, partly as an effect of the economic boom and partly as a result of legislation, there has probably been a relative increase in the educational and employment opportunities open to poor people. It is hard to judge whether there has been any accompanying increase in cultural equality, but there are some indications that the dominant culture in Ireland has become a bit more tolerant.

At the same time, growing economic inequality in Ireland and globally seems to continue to inhibit rather than facilitate the relief of poverty. To take an obvious example, the resources which have been used to cut capital gains tax might have been used to reduce poverty instead. Moreover, greater economic inequality will eventually and inevitably worsen inequalities of opportunity, with attendant effects on the ability of poor people to work their way out of poverty and to influence state policy. We are also entitled to wonder about how increasing economic inequality will affect people's commitment to social justice, as well as its impact on the prospects for continued economic growth.

We are a long way from eradicating poverty in Ireland. Although we have made a little progress, the evidence is far too weak to show that we can end poverty without tackling inequality. The case for linking poverty and equality remains strong.

Objection 3: 'Eliminating poverty may require greater equality, but it does not require full equality.'

A final objection to the arguments of this paper is that they purport to prove too much. Perhaps they do show that the struggle against poverty has to be linked to the pursuit of much more equality, but they do not show that we need anything like full equality.

I mention this 'objection' only to accept it. I very much doubt whether one can show that the elimination of poverty requires full equality, or even that all of the reasons for being against poverty are reasons for favouring equality. That is not because I reject full equality, since the case for equality goes beyond poverty-relief. What I hope to have shown is that the relief of poverty requires much more equality than we have. If I have succeeded in that aim, I am happy to concede that these arguments alone do not prove the value of full equality.

Objections and replies: summary

<i>Objection</i>	<i>Reply</i>
'Poverty isn't socially relative.'	Even if true, applies to only one argument.
'Experience shows that we can reduce poverty amidst increasing inequality.'	The evidence is questionable.
'Eliminating poverty may require <i>greater</i> equality, but it does not require <i>full</i> equality.'	Fine. Let's have a lot more equality.

Implications for anti-poverty policy

If the arguments of this paper are correct, they have important implications for anti-poverty policy. For they show that anyone who believes in the eradication of poverty needs to embrace a wide range of policies for promoting economic, cultural, political and affective equality, as well as real equality of opportunity. This is obviously not the place to spell out those policies in detail, but I want to conclude by making some general observations about the shape of such policies.

Poverty-proofing implies equality-proofing

For the last three years, the government has been committed to 'poverty-proofing', a process which involves assessing policies for their impact 'on poverty and on inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction' (National Anti-Poverty Strategy Unit, 1999). If the arguments of this paper are sound, the inequalities which lead to poverty are wide-ranging. For example, policies which increase economic inequality, such as a cut in the top rate of income tax, have a negative impact on poverty even if they increase the incomes of the poor. Interestingly, both the Department of Finance and the Department of Social, Community and Family

Affairs poverty-proofed Budget 2001. The DSCFA guardedly recognised the connection between poverty and income inequality, and commented on the egalitarian impact of the social welfare component of the budget (DSCFA 2000). The Department of Finance paper faced a more difficult struggle. Unwilling either to deny the connection between economic inequality and poverty or to criticise the budget, it commented that tax had been reduced for low earners and that the social welfare measures had achieved a ‘balance in the distributional effects of this Budget’—whatever that means (Department of Finance 2000). If poverty-proofing is to be taken seriously, then any measure which increases economic, cultural, political or affective inequality, or inequality of opportunity, should be rejected, and it is perfectly appropriate for the Combat Poverty Agency and other anti-poverty groups to criticise the overall distributional effects of policies and not just their immediate impact on the poor.

Different groups have different priorities

Equality does not mean treating everyone the same: it means treating people equally well, in a number of different dimensions. If we review carefully the different social groups disadvantaged by inequality, it is clear that they have different priorities, and that there are significant differences among the members of any one group. To be sure, it is hard to think of any impoverished group that is not affected by the interaction of inequalities of opportunity and of economic, cultural, political and affective inequalities. But for some groups, such as low-wage workers, it appears that economic inequalities play the most important role in creating and reinforcing their poverty, while for others, such as Travellers, it seems that the most important inequalities generating poverty are cultural. (For a more detailed discussion, see Lynch, Baker and Cantillon 2000, 2001.) It is important to bear these differences in mind in designing effective egalitarian policies. That is why it is important, for example, for the Combat Poverty Agency and other anti-poverty bodies to support the full involvement of marginalised groups in the development of social policy.

The importance of political empowerment

I have argued that political inequality is a major factor in perpetuating poverty and other inequalities. Thus, an effective anti-poverty strategy has to include measures to challenge power inequalities, and in particular to empower marginalised and subordinate groups. That is why, for example, the Combat Poverty Agency is perfectly justified in supporting political activity and not just the direct relief of deprivation, and why its publications like *Working for Change: A Guide to Influencing Policy in Ireland* (Harvey 1998) are as important as more traditional measures. It is why the specific inclusion of marginalised groups in local, regional and national decision-making processes is vital, and why their participation should be properly resourced. It is why there is an urgent need to limit the role of private finance in the political system.

The need for ideological change

A fourth set of implications for anti-poverty policy concerns the need for ideological change. Our society seems to have a broad consensus on the importance of reducing poverty but no similar agreement on the value of equality. Yet if my arguments are correct, the absence of a commitment to equality is a major factor in the failure of our attempts to eliminate poverty. This is partly because ideological beliefs in the inherent inferiority of some social groups help to undermine the force of general platitudes about the evils of poverty. It is also because people who believe that they deserve their

privileges can come to think that poverty is bad but that it requires nothing from them. Yet another reason is that people can deplore poverty in the same spirit in which they deplore the Irish climate or an earthquake in Nicaragua: it is a terrible thing but, sure, nothing can be done about it. If we are serious about fighting poverty, and therefore need to be serious about fighting inequality, then we must work to change these beliefs about social status, social justice and the possibilities of social change. For these reasons, it is perfectly appropriate for the Combat Poverty Agency and other anti-poverty organisations to resource activities which contribute to ideological change. Such activities include grass-root activism to challenge conventional beliefs, community education projects which allow their participants to think about and analyse poverty and equality, public campaigns against cultural and economic inequality, and academic research and its dissemination.

The need for structural change

A final implication of the arguments of this paper is that the elimination of poverty requires major changes in social structures. Poverty is not a matter of personal pathology which can be solved by curing the poor of their supposed inadequacies. It is a condition which is generated by structures of domination and oppression in our society and in the world more generally. Exactly how to name and analyse these structures and their interaction is a matter of continuing debate, but one way or another they clearly include capitalism (a predominantly market-based economy in which the means of production are privately owned and controlled), patriarchy (systems of gender relationships which privilege men over women) and racism (social systems which divide people into 'races' and privilege some 'races' over others). They also include structures which systematically exclude people with impairments from participating fully in their societies, structures which socially construct a division between 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' persons and privilege the former over the latter, and systems which privilege dominant over subordinate ethnic groups. Thus, organisations which aim to eliminate poverty need to devote some of their energies to imagining alternatives to these oppressive structures, and to supporting the changes necessary for achieving them.

Implications for anti-poverty policy: summary

Poverty-proofing implies equality-proofing

Different groups have different priorities

The importance of political empowerment

The need for ideological change

The need for structural change

Conclusion

As I was sitting at my computer working on this paper, the doorbell rang downstairs. It was a young man with a scrawny dog who explained that he was sleeping rough and asked for some help. I think the polite word for describing this kind of situation is 'ironic'. Regardless of one's views about how to respond to such requests, it is clear that we will never end poverty here in Ireland or throughout the world through personal

charity. Nor, I regret to say, will it be ended by people like me writing papers like this. If poverty is to be eradicated, it will be through a political movement implementing structural changes and motivated by a commitment to equality and a deep anger at injustice. I hope I have said something to explain the need for that commitment to equality, and that in some small way I have contributed to that anger.

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‘NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOR’

CONFERENCE OF THE COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

DUBLIN, IRELAND

MONDAY 28 MAY 2001

*Presentation of Professor Paul Hunt
(Rapporteur of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
Human Rights Centre, Essex University, England;
School of Law, Waikato University, New Zealand)*

I would like to warmly thank the organisers for the invitation to join you today and commend them for organising this major conference around the broad themes of poverty, rights and equality. These themes are among the most important on the current agenda of the United Nations. Although our focus today is Ireland, our deliberations are of great relevance to many other individual states, as well as the international community as a whole.

I have been asked to speak about economic, social and cultural rights in the context of anti-poverty strategies.

First, I will make some comments about the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Second, I will identify some of the obstacles - I call them ‘glass barriers’ - confronting those who wish to integrate economic, social and cultural rights into anti-poverty policies.

Third, I will make some remarks about human rights based anti-poverty strategies.

The *Conclusion* makes a couple of final points, in particular concerning national human rights institutions.

I am speaking in a personal capacity and not on behalf of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

I. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The Covenant has been ratified by 145 states, including Ireland. It encompasses a wide-range of economic, social and cultural rights including non-discrimination and equality, freedom of association, fair conditions of work, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health protection, the right to education and the right to take part in cultural life.

States that have chosen to ratify the Covenant are obliged to *progressively realise* the enumerated rights. That means a state is expected and obliged to do better this year than it did five years ago. Also, states that choose to ratify the Covenant are obliged to realise the enumerated rights subject to *resource availability*. That means the Covenant demands more from Ireland than it does from Chad. Some Covenant

obligations, however, do *not* vary from one state to another. Some Covenant obligations apply uniformly across all states no matter what their stage of economic development - the most obvious example being non-discrimination. Even the poorest state may not discriminate on the basis of sex and race.¹

May I emphasise that although some of the obligations in the Covenant may be realised progressively and are subject to resource availability, nonetheless the Covenant does impose legally binding obligations on all states parties.

UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR)

The Committee is charged with responsibility for monitoring states parties' implementation of the Covenant. It consists of 18 independent experts acting in their personal capacities.

Every five years, each state party is obliged to submit a report to the Committee. Each report covers all the rights in the Covenant and explains what the state is doing to implement the rights to housing, health, education and so on.

The Committee sets aside 1 to 1.5 days to consider the report, in public session, with the state. The state sends a delegation from the capital to discuss the report with Committee members. The Committee members ask the delegation questions, the delegation does its best to reply - we have a 'constructive dialogue'. At the end of this public process, the Committee goes into closed session and agrees what we call 'Concluding Observations' about the state. Once agreed in private among Committee members, these Concluding Observations are then made public.

Ireland

Take the case of Ireland. Ireland submitted a report and the Committee considered it in 1999. The Committee also gratefully received a wealth of information from Irish civil society. This non-governmental information assisted the Committee in its 'constructive dialogue' with the Irish delegation.

In our Concluding Observations, we commend some developments in Ireland, including the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Plan, the poverty-proofing of some policy proposals and the projected increase in international development assistance from .29% to .45% of GNP.²

We regret that the Covenant has not been fully incorporated or reflected in domestic legislation and that it is rarely invoked before the courts. The Committee also regrets that the National Anti-Poverty Strategy does not adopt a human rights framework consistent with the provisions of the Covenant.

The Committee recommends that Ireland incorporates justiciable economic, social and cultural rights into domestic law and that it integrates a human rights approach into the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Concluding Observations run to some thirty paragraphs, here I have mentioned only a few of them.

I am not an apologist for the Covenant and Committee process I have just outlined. Elsewhere I have described the UN human rights system as "feeble, fragile and flawed."³ However, despite its manifest limitations, the Covenant and Committee

process does provide an embryonic form of international accountability in relation to economic, social and cultural rights. These days we hear much about globalisation. The international human rights system is a sort of globalisation of accountability. Just a few years ago such a system of international accountability was unthinkable.

Before making some remarks about the Committee's recent statement on poverty and the Covenant, I would like to make a few comments about some of the invisible obstacles and difficulties confronting those who wish to integrate human rights into anti-poverty strategies.

II. Glass barriers: some obstacles to a rights-based approach to poverty

Ghettoisation of rights

One obstacle to the integration of human rights into an anti-poverty strategy is the historic ghettoisation of human rights. For many years, human rights have been legally and politically important. But, despite this, they have - in many cases - been tucked away in the Ministry of Justice and/or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Few states and few international organisations have explicitly integrated human rights across all their relevant policy-making processes.

This compartmentalisation of human rights poses a particular problem for rights-based approaches to poverty because, as we all know, poverty is a multi-sectoral, multi-dimensional issue. One Ministry or sector cannot effectively tackle poverty - and so a human rights based approach to poverty must be multi-sectoral. But because most states are not used to integrating human rights across different sectors it is often difficult to formulate and implement multi-sectoral, human rights-based anti-poverty strategies.

Faced with this problem, it seems to me that the correct response is simply to keep trying. We need practice, persistence and patience.

Marginalisation of economic, social and cultural rights

Another problem that we have to recognise is the historic marginalisation of economic, social and cultural rights within the human rights framework.⁴

It is well-known that much more attention has been devoted to understanding and realising civil and political rights than economic, social and cultural rights. Within the human rights framework, civil and political rights have been privileged and economic, social and cultural rights have been neglected. Consequently, there is a much richer jurisprudential understanding of civil and political rights than there is of economic, social and cultural rights. Of course, poverty bears upon all rights: civil, political, economic, social and cultural. But certainly poverty is very intimately linked to the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to housing, education and health protection - and there can be no doubt that the absence of a deep legal tradition in these rights poses a problem for rights-based anti-poverty strategies.

Reluctance to acknowledge poverty is a denial of human rights

Briefly, a third problem is that many states still refuse to accept that poverty is a denial of human rights. The UN General Assembly and Commission on Human Rights have recognised that poverty is a human rights issue.⁵ But they cannot bring

themselves to take the next step and acknowledge that poverty is a breach of human rights.

Some progress

It should be said that each of these problems is being addressed to one degree or another, in one way or another. These glass barriers are slowly being dismantled and removed.

Take the *first obstacle*: the ghettoisation or compartmentalisation of human rights. In his reforms of 1997, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan designated human rights as a cross-cutting issue to be integrated across the world organisation's activities.⁶ This year, the UN Commission on Human Rights passed a resolution that, for the first time, calls upon all states parties to "ensure that the Covenant is taken into account in all of their relevant national and international policy-making processes".⁷

For its part, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is now urging states to apply the Covenant in a coherent and consistent manner. To give just one example, the Committee recommended that Iceland:

review and strengthen its institutional arrangements, within the government administration, which are designed to ensure that its obligations under the Covenant are taken into account, at an early stage, in the Government's formulation of national policy on issues such as social welfare, housing, health and education.⁸

Last year there was an interesting development in New Zealand. The Government established an independent review of its human rights arrangements. One element of the review was:

To re-evaluate the adequacy of current mechanisms, and if necessary, recommend changes that would ensure that international human rights obligations are taken into account in the development and implementation of government policy, practice and New Zealand legislation.⁹

Now complete, the review makes some modest recommendations about how Wellington could better integrate human rights across New Zealand's policy making processes.

Consider the *second obstacle*: the marginalisation of economic, social and cultural rights. At both the national and international levels, these rights are now receiving much more attention than just a few years ago.

Recently, Norway has incorporated the Covenant into domestic law. In the 1990s, South Africa constitutionalised economic, social and cultural rights and made them justiciable – that is, individuals may go to court for the vindication of their constitutionally protected economic, social and cultural rights.

Also, I think there is a faint but growing trend of using civil and political rights to protect economic, social and cultural rights. Thus, Spanish environmental pollution that endangered health was found to be in breach of a classic civil and political right -

the right to family life and the home.¹⁰ For many years, the Indian Supreme Court has used civil and political rights, such as the right to life, to protect economic, social and cultural rights.¹¹ There are, by the way, interesting similarities between the Indian and Irish Constitutions in relation to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is not clear to me why the Indian courts have been more enterprising than the Irish judiciary in their approach to these issues. Have the legal arguments been put to the Irish courts? I am not sure.

At the international level, in the last three years, the UN Commission on Human Rights has appointed three Special Rapporteurs on specific rights: education, housing and food. In the same period, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has taken measures to clarify and publicise its understanding of the rights to food, education and health protection.¹² To her great credit, Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has repeatedly insisted that more attention must be devoted to economic, social and cultural rights and she has taken initiatives to enhance our understanding of them.

In short, the historic marginalisation of economic, social and cultural rights is being eroded. We are beginning to get a better sense of the contours and content of economic, social and cultural rights, and how their enjoyment may be monitored. A legal tradition in economic, social and cultural rights is gradually taking shape. But there is still a long way to go.

What about the *third obstacle*: the refusal of many states to acknowledge that poverty is a denial of human rights? Again, Mary Robinson has publicly insisted that poverty is a breach of human rights. As for the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, earlier this month it adopted a statement on poverty, the first paragraph of which says:

In the light of experience gained over many years, including the examination of numerous States parties' reports, the Committee holds the firm view that poverty constitutes a denial of human rights.¹³

Whether other UN bodies will come around to this position remains to be seen.

So I have tried to signal some of the obstacles – the glass barriers or, some would say, the class barriers - to the formulation and implementation of human rights based anti-poverty strategies. It would be foolhardy to pretend they do not exist. And I have also attempted to show that some progress is being made to dismantle and remove these obstacles.

III. A rights-based approach to poverty

On 4 May 2001, the Committee agreed a statement on poverty and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The statement has been made available to all conference participants and so I will not go through it in any detail. Instead, I confine myself to six main points:

1. In my view, the human rights community has been slow to identify what a human rights approach adds to the struggle for poverty eradication. This is partly self-criticism because it extends to the Committee on which I sit.

2. The Committee's statement is the first attempt by a UN body to make the conceptual links between poverty and human rights. The statement does not purport to provide an operational anti-poverty programme. Rather, it attempts to make clear and concise conceptual links between poverty and the Covenant thereby facilitating the development of operational rights-based anti-poverty initiatives.
3. Human rights provide a framework of norms, standards or rules upon which detailed anti-poverty policies, programmes and projects can be constructed. Rights can help to ensure that essential elements of anti-poverty strategies, such as non-discrimination, equality, participation and accountability, receive the sustained attention they deserve.¹⁴
4. The Covenant empowers the poor by granting them rights and imposing legal obligations on the state. Crucially, rights and obligations demand accountability. Unless supported by a system of accountability, rights and obligations become no more than window-dressing. Thus, an international human rights approach to poverty emphasises obligations and requires that all duty-holders are held to account for their conduct in relation to international human rights law. The mechanisms of accountability are likely to be a combination of judicial, quasi-judicial, administrative and political.¹⁵
5. If the basic conceptual foundations for a human rights approach to poverty consists of norms, obligations and accountability what, in practical terms, does this mean? Very briefly, I suggest it means that, within the framework established by international human rights law, a state has to:
 - a. elaborate specific, detailed norms or standards in relation to the key poverty rights, such as participation, discrimination, equality, a basic standard of living, housing, health protection and education;
 - b. establish how the norms are to be monitored eg by reference, where appropriate, to indicators and benchmarks;
 - c. clarify what its obligations are in relation to each of the norms eg by reference, where appropriate, to indicators and benchmarks;
 - d. establish accessible, transparent and effective mechanisms of accountability (judicial, quasi-judicial, administrative and political) in relation to each of the norms.
6. In the Committee's opinion, anti-poverty strategies are more likely to be effective, sustainable, inclusive, equitable and meaningful to those living in poverty if they are based upon international human rights.¹⁶

IV. Conclusion

For all of us, the integration of human rights into anti-poverty strategies is very much work in progress. This is pioneering work. There is no map and there are few signposts. I very much hope that today we can help each other find ways forward. I very much look forward to hearing your comments and ideas.

Time permits me to make only two further points by way of conclusion.

First, national human rights institutions have a very important role to play in relation to economic, social and cultural rights. As the Australian experience shows, public inquiries on homelessness, the mentally ill and other economic, social and cultural rights issues, are powerful tools for social justice.¹⁷

Short of the conduct of a public inquiry, there are many other ways in which a national human rights institution can promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights. Take the specific example of the right to education.

A national human rights institution might start with articles 13 and 14 of the Covenant on the right to education. It might then look at what the Committee has said about article 13¹⁸ and prepare its own guidelines on the right to education – guidelines for teachers, students, institutions' governing councils, and government. It might identify nationally appropriate right to education indicators and benchmarks and use them to monitor progress, every couple of years, in selected geographical areas. In this way, the national human rights institution applies broad international human rights norms, tailors them to the national context, and uses them to monitor the right to education at the national and local levels.

My last point is this. Ireland is gaining a great deal of experience about anti-poverty strategies. Of course, it does not have all the answers. Nonetheless, it is giving these issues more serious institutional attention than the great majority of other states. I hope the Irish Government, and others familiar with the insights gained, will share their experience in the UN and elsewhere. It seems to me that this is an area in which Ireland can play a leading international role.

28 May 2001

¹ See Paul Hunt, "State Obligations, Indicators, Benchmarks, and the Right to Education", 1998, 4, Human Rights Law and Practice (NZ), 109.

² CESCR, Report on the Twentieth and Twenty-First Sessions, page 33.

³ Paul Hunt, "The UN and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Some Recent Developments: 'The Globalisation of Accountability'", 1999, 5, Human Rights Law and Practice (NZ), 82.

⁴ Paul Hunt, *Reclaiming Social Rights: International and Comparative Perspectives*, Dartmouth, 1996.

⁵ For example, see General Assembly resolution 55/106 of 4 December 2000 and Commission on Human Rights resolution 2001/31 of 23 April 2001.

⁶ Report of the Secretary-General, *Renewing the United Nations. A Programme for Reform*, July 1997, paras 78-79.

⁷ E/CN.4/2001/L.42.

⁸ E/C.12/1/Add.32.

⁹ See Ministry of Justice, *Re-evaluation of the Human Rights Protections in New Zealand*, October 2000, page 17.

¹⁰ *Lopez Ostra v Spain* (1994) 20 EHRR 28787, ECHR.

¹¹ See footnote 4, chapter 4.

¹² See its General Comments Nos 11, 13 and 14.

¹³ Statement adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on 4 May 2001, *Poverty and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, E/C.12/2001/10.

¹⁴ See Statement para 9.

¹⁵ See Statement para 14.

¹⁶ See Statement para 13.

¹⁷ See footnote 4, pages 190-195.

¹⁸ General Comment No 13.

Narrowing the Gap between Rich and Poor

A National Conference organised by the Combat Poverty Agency
Monday 28th May 2001

Investment in Public Services as an Anti Poverty Strategy

Input by: Fintan Farrell, Policy Support Worker, Irish Traveller Movement.

Context

The well being of a person is not just an issue of income, though income is an important factor. Of key importance is the level of access to goods and services that the person can derive from their income. In particular whether that income can guarantee access to essential services such as health, education, accommodation etc. In a competitive world where access to goods and services is determined by the open market it is inevitable that there are winners and losers in the race to access goods and services. The provision of public services in essential areas means that they are not subject to the rules of the open market economy and therefore can be accessible to those experiencing poverty and inequality. In addition universal access to these public services can be an important factor in contributing to cohesion in society.

Investment in Public Services itself is not automatically an anti poverty strategy. Experience shows that those who derive most benefit from public services are from middle and upper class backgrounds. The reality of who participates and at what levels in the education system they participate at, demonstrates this outcome. The numbers of people from working class areas, or ethnic minorities, who participate in third level, are minimal, while third level receives the higher levels of investment. Similarly a look at the cost of mortgage interest relief as compared to investment in public housing and accommodation will also demonstrate the reality. Therefore if investing in public housing and accommodation is to be part of an anti poverty strategy there needs to be poverty proofing of that investment. A further complicating factor is the reality of the interface between poverty and inequality, and how discrimination can lead to poverty. Therefore in ensuring anti poverty outcomes we need also to address the equality agenda, to combat discrimination and to accommodate difference.

The level of Public Service provision in Ireland is out of line with that available in other EU countries. Despite our increasingly wealthy society we still have minimal investment in early years education, childcare, public housing and accommodation, health services, public transport, recreational, sporting and cultural facilities. The absence of such public services has a particularly negative effect on the quality of life for people likely to experience poverty or inequality including, families with children, those dependent on social welfare, low paid, young people, older people and those living in situations of rural isolation or urban deprivation. If we are to achieve a high level of public service provision then the challenge is to value this investment over and above tax cuts that do not benefit the least well off.

In this paper I wish to look at:

- Why we should invest in public services.
- How we can maximise the potential of this investment to achieve anti poverty outcomes.
- Identify the key policy opportunities for strengthening investment in public services
- Identify ways forward for this approach.

Why invest in Public Services?

In this section I want to look at the reasons for investing in Public Services. I wish to address the issues of: direct impact, cost effectiveness of long term investment, rights as a rationale for investment, quality of universal service, and the inadequacy of present public service provision.

Direct impact:

Appropriate social expenditure can distribute good in kind and have a direct impact on people living in or at risk from poverty. This can in a practical sense alleviate some of the impacts of poverty, for example the recent decision to invest in schools meals was welcomed by antipoverty groups because they saw the public investment as offsetting some of the negative outcomes of poverty such as low nutrition. As important they welcomed the investment because they saw it as a way of breaking cycles of poverty in that the children will be better able to participate in and benefit from the total investment in education. Investment can also minimise the risk of poverty for example the investment in the infrastructure of MABS has already had an impact in increasing the disposable income of families and in all likelihood moving them above the poverty line.

Cost effectiveness of long term investment:

There has been a growing trend in recent years to value “social spending as a factor of productivity” or to see “social protection as an investment”. A much quoted example is the US High Scope early childhood intervention where for every \$1 invested there was a \$7 return on subsequent state savings. Whilst no parallel examples exist in Ireland it does not take too much imagination to see how investment in quality social and economic reintegration programmes for offenders could reduce rates of recidivism and save the £53,000 cost per annum per prisoner. Likewise investment in primary health care may lessen demand on more expensive secondary health care.

A second concept of economic rationale is cost effective investment. Here as in the recent Cabinet health meeting in Co Louth the concept of cost effective investment was used against those arguing for greater investment in health. This also happened recently in relation to arguments about costings for a Traveller Halting Site. Decisions of such

importance cannot only be made on the basis of economic criteria but must also take into account concern for the common good. In addition one wonders if the same level of rigor is given to other large scale spending projects.

It follows that one should be cautious in relation to the overuse of cost effective arguments, unless they are developed in the context of social and economic rights. The rights and well being of people should not be reduced to arguments about economic rationales or economic effectiveness, as seen above these can be used for and against social investment. It is of course right that investment is efficient and effective but also that such investment is a validation of rights.

Rights as a rationale for investment:

I mentioned earlier of how investment in public services act as a counter balance and a check to the market led inequality of access to services. There are some instances where it is in the common good for services to be universal or delivered through public rather than private investment. Some of these instances are prescribed as rights in the constitution or in other forms of legislation. The guarantee of education in the constitution underpins the rationale for state investment in education. Particular schemes such as Supplementary Welfare Allowance are guaranteed by legislation. When this is the case the state is obliged to invest in the appropriate services. The establishment of rights can be an important factor in the establishment of priorities for public spending.

Quality of universal services:

In my introduction I noted that there are some times regressive redistributive outcomes in social spending and used education as an example. However it is clear that often, universal type social provision and spending brings with it other social objectives that acts as a counter weight to these regressive redistributive outcomes. These objectives are often referred to as social cohesion, the common experiences and solidarities that glue society together. If we look at the US for example we see segregation in public and private education with huge inequalities in outcome. In Ireland we see how in health the mix of public and private provision (in the name of economic efficiency) leaves poor and low-income families in the public system on waiting lists in a two-tier health system. The segregation means that it is easier and has been easier to allow under investment and low quality services go undetected. Segregated services can all too often mean poor quality services for poor people, while universal provision can be a better guarantee of quality of service.

At the same time just because a service is universal, does not mean it is accessible. Barriers such as transport, literacy or culturally inappropriate delivery often mean that people cannot access the public services. There are clear arguments to be made about investing in targeted delivery of universal services.

Inadequacy of present public service provision

Perhaps the most compelling reason to invest in public services is the sheer inadequacy of present public service provision caused in some part by the drop of over one third per cent of GDP on public expenditure (43% - 30%) over the last 15 years and its subsequent impact on social provision.

This drop has happened in the context of increased pressure due to rising numbers using the services and increased expectations of users of services. There is an argument if services are to match need and expectations that a constant % of GDP is guaranteed for public expenditure. This would require of course that we agree that a constant % of GDP is raised through taxation. It would also be useful to guarantee a floor of spending in the event of recession and within that a floor of minimum services that could be guaranteed.

How can we achieve Anti Poverty Outcomes?

Achieving anti poverty outcomes from investment in public services requires a range of strategies and approaches. These include partnership and participation, targeted investment, poverty proofing, and equality action plans.

Partnership and Participation:

Partnership and participation of anti poverty and equality interests in decision making is essential in terms of achieving positive outcomes for people experiencing poverty and inequality. Here we look to the remarkable evolution in the arenas of social partnership. These arenas whether they relate to policy thinking (NESC), policy making (national agreements) or policy implementation (NESF) must continue to evolve as arenas of negotiation in relation to the further evolution of public sector service provision. A social partnership ethos has begun and should continue to pervade the design and delivery of services. A negotiation of this design and delivery democratises the service, broadens a sense of ownership to making it work and enhances its relevance and capacity to realise anti poverty and equality outcomes. Participation requires time and resources. The parties involved need resources to develop the quality of their agendas and their accountability.

Targeted Investment:

Targeting of public services in disadvantaged areas and in disadvantaged communities is an important element of an overall strategy of investing in public services. The rationale for this type of targeted investment includes: -the importance of addressing past neglect; the importance of addressing specific needs, the importance of rebuilding community infrastructure; the importance of producing a situation where benefits can be realised by these communities from mainstream services.

Poverty Proofing:

Poverty proofing provides an important tool for securing anti poverty outcomes from public investment. Poverty proofing involves the setting of ambitious targets. Poverty proofing should ensure that decisions are assessed for their contribution to realise these targets and the impact on groups experiencing poverty. The participation by anti poverty and equality interests in this assessment should be an integral part of the poverty proofing process. In addition the monitoring of outcomes needs to be part of the poverty proofing exercise. Work currently going on under NESC highlights the importance of evidence based decision making and the need to invest resources in poverty proofing and the need to build a capacity to poverty proof. Poverty proofing needs to focus attention on impact and actions for people who live facing poverty and inequality, targets and participation won't change their lives. It is only positive outcomes that make a real difference.

Building an integrated system for poverty proofing and equality proofing should be used to strengthen anti poverty and equality outcomes. Such an approach should build the capacity to understand difference and its practical implications for service design and delivery into the proofing process. The development of this approach needs to be a participative process of negotiation. The goal must be to accommodate difference and seek equality of outcome.

Much has been made of poverty proofing as an advance in public policy making. While this is true there is a need to give poverty proofing further reinforcement. We could look to the example of Northern Ireland. There is a duty on designated public sector bodies to promote equality. Equality schemes are produced to set standards. Areas of policy and provision are identified to be subjected to equality impact assessments to set guidelines. The Multiparty Agreement commits both governments to equivalence of rights north and south. Following from this commitment and the Northern Ireland experience, this mechanism could well be the best means for reinforcing our approach to poverty proofing.

Equality Action Plans:

The provisions of the Equal Status Legislation have a role to play in securing anti poverty outcomes from investment in public services. Public sector provision is bound by the legislation. There is a need to build infrastructure to address equality obligations in this area. This infrastructure should include an equal status policy, the appointment of a responsible officer, ensuring all staff are aware of the requirements of the legislation and prioritising positive action across the grounds covered by the legislation. A useful starting point would be for public sector providers to conduct an equality review and to prepare equality action plans to further build their commitment in this area.

Key Policy Opportunities

Key policy opportunities to address the issues of anti poverty outcomes from investment in public services include, the Strategic Management Initiative, the National Anti Poverty Strategy, Local Government Reform, RAPID, Targeted Policy Initiatives, and the next NESc strategy report.

Strategic Management Initiative:

The Strategic Management Initiative offers a key overarching policy framework for ensuring that public services are responsive to the needs of people experiencing poverty and inequality. I wish to draw attention to two aspects of the Strategic Management Initiative, the Quality Customer Service Initiative and the Performance Management and Development System. The quality customer service initiative has established principles to be reflected in the customer service action plans of all government departments. These include an equality/diversity principle, which focuses attention on groups living in poverty, on groups covered by equality legislation and on rural-urban difference. It is vital this principle is turned into practical actions, through new investments and through new initiative. Supports are required to assist this process. The pack developed by the Equality Authority and the Quality Customer Service working group is a good start but more is required. The pack looks at accessibility, accommodating diversity and developing an equal status policy.

The performance management and development system being rolled out across the public sector provides another valuable potential driving force for an anti-poverty and equality dimension to the public service. All staff will be preparing role profiles and identifying their development needs against an agreed template and against agreed organisational principles or themes. There could be a valuable focus on developing the capacity and commitment of all staff within this to ensure they contribute to an organisation building a more equal society free of social exclusion.

NAPS review and NAPsincl

The linking of the NAPS and the European Union strategy in the fight against exclusion (NAPsincl) holds out the hope of introducing a greater sense of dynamic to the NAPS process. The addition of new areas, such as, access to rights, new technology, access to justice, access to culture and sport are to be welcomed. The methods in the NAPsincl such as the open method of coordination, the exchange of experience, the linking of targets and action programmes, peer review and open accountability may add a useful element of competitiveness to our anti poverty work. The commitment as part of the NAPS review to make use of the NAPs inclusion template is also significant.

NAPS and the review of NAPS provide the framework for setting targets in some of the most significant areas where public service investment is required. This is a key task for the working groups under the NAPS review in the areas of, Health, Housing and accommodation, Education, Employment, Rural poverty, Urban disadvantage and

Income adequacy. The targets must be ambitious, measurable, and consistent with other policy commitments and must be accompanied by strategies and programmes to realise the targets. The targets in the individual areas must be consistent with and part of a visible overall strategy to address poverty and exclusion. Cross cutting issues such as, child poverty, women's poverty, older people's poverty are also to be addressed in each of the areas. The issue of racism leading to poverty must also be included.

Local Government Reform:

The reform of local government provides an opportunity to put the issue of poverty and inequality central to local government. This requires building an anti poverty and equality structure at this level, which would reflect institutional developments at the national level. This also requires developing relevant local data collection, agreeing local indicators and setting local targets. Building local capacity and commitment to an anti poverty approach is also a central part of this challenge. The County Development Board strategy plans must give concrete expression to the centrality of anti poverty work to local government. The Local Government Learning Network established by Combat Poverty is an important development and should assist local government with the 'how to' of anti poverty work.

RAPID:

The new RAPID initiative negotiated as part of the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness and the soon to emerge targeted rural investment initiative is an important opportunity to demonstrate targeted approaches. The opportunity presented by RAPID should not be missed and should be a demonstration of best practice in relation to involving the communities in the regeneration of their area. RAPID as well as regenerating communities, should demonstrate how targeted investment ensures that communities who experience disadvantage can also benefit from mainstream services.

Other Targeted Policy Initiatives:

It is important that as well as overarching policy initiatives that we have policy initiatives aimed at specific areas of need such as the National Health Strategy or the Housing Forum and at specific categories of people, such as the National Children's Strategy, the Homeless Strategy, the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community and of the Commission on the Status of People with Disability. These targeted policy areas as well as looking at the specific needs can ensure that these specific needs are addressed in the wider policy context.

NESC Strategy Report:

The next NESC strategy report will set the context and inform any future national agreement. The NESC strategy report will be a key policy document in relation to investment in public services. It is essential that this report sets out clearly the challenge in relation to ensuring that investment in public services produces positive outcomes for

people experience poverty and inequality. Identifying this challenge in the NESC report is vital as it will be a key reference document for a range of players concerned with investment in public services.

Way Forward

Data Collection

In order to be able to assess if progress is being made we need the relevant data to make that assessment. The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) captures the reality of the current gaps and deficits in relation to data collection. The programme also sets out clear challenges and proposals to address these deficits. It is important that these commitments within PPF be immediately progressed.

Benchmarking

We need to set ambitious targets for ourselves in relation to public service provision. Best international standards should be our benchmark in this regard. It is the contention of this paper that the points to be measured for excellence in relation to public service provision must include equality diversity in relation to access of the services and anti poverty outcomes from the investment in the services.

Annual Budget:

The annual budget is the key moment when the government's priorities are made clear. Ambitious targets, well-defined policies, strategy documents, important in themselves are no substitute for cash. Hence the real test of how well poverty proofing is imbedded in the governments administrative procedures is the extent to which the budget itself as well as its components is poverty proofed. This is a challenge that has still not being adequately addressed and meeting this challenge is key to finding the way forward.

Innovation:

As well as making use of the current opportunities and mechanisms we need new ideas to be developed that have the potential to address the situation of those living in poverty. These new ideas need to turn the new context (re wealth creation, new policy, new practice, new investment) into a more inclusive society. We need to create the space for innovation by taking the time to engage in local level thinking, to hear the potential coming from the world of academia and to learn and be inspired by experiences outside of Ireland including outside any narrow euro centric view. Thinking through the implications of a rights based approach may also be a source for new ideas and creativity.

Conclusion:

The next general election will be a key moment for developing a political vision for the future direction of Irish society. Investment in public service provision, the objectives of such investment and the commitment to address poverty and inequality within that investment should be a central part of the political debate leading up to that election. This conference is timely and can contribute the arguments needed to win electoral support for narrowing the gap between rich and poor. The media and in particular the public sector media will have an important role in ensuring that the arguments go deeper than general expressions of commitment to addressing poverty. Ultimately the challenge is to the political parties to set out clearly their vision of an Ireland where wealth creation can be sustained and their priorities for the spending of that wealth.

