



***Having Your Say Programme***  
**A Report from**  
**Consultative Seminar and Roundtable**  
**on**  
**Policy Learning Support Needs**

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## **SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1. Background**

Combat Poverty considers that policies intended to tackle poverty are more likely to work if people and communities affected by poverty are enabled to input into their design, planning, implementation and review. People in poverty may lack the financial resources to do this. They may also have insufficient access to the skills and capacities common to policy planning and public decision-making processes. The Combat Poverty's *Having Your Say* Programme is a three-year programme, which was launched in November 2005 with the aim of strengthening the policy voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty.

A number of national and international frameworks support people's right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their views and experiences listened to and acted on. The *Having Your Say Programme* is informed by these frameworks and will relate to many of them during its delivery and implementation. These frameworks include:

#### **1. National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/incl)**

The Irish NAP/incl recognises the policy task to develop ways of further increasing and improving participation in the NAP/incl of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion at local, regional, and national level.

#### **2. EU Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) 2000**

Four objectives common to the EU were agreed within the OMC approach. One of these concerned the mobilisation of all relevant bodies in society in pursuit of the social policy goals of the EU. The Irish NAP/incl (see above) is an expression of the OMC in relation to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

### 3. The White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity 2000

The Government's White Paper is the framework governing the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector. It states

*....The sector has a specific role in ensuring that the experience and interests of marginalized communities and groups are articulated and heard when decisions that affect them are being made.*

### 4. United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development 1986

Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development sets out that:

*The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all people are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social cultural and political development.*

### 5. Supporting volunteering and social capital

The Irish National Committee on Volunteering published a report *Tipping the Balance* (2002) recognising volunteering as: a vital dimension of democratic and social life ....it is viewed as essential to the development of civic participation, social solidarity...

### 6. Social partnership and active citizenship

The Government's White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity* acknowledges that key decisions on social and economic policy issues, are increasingly exercised by the Government in the context of social partnership

### 7. Poverty and peace building

Combat Poverty is concerned with the promotion of inclusion, reconciliation and peace building and has a special remit in relation to tackling poverty in the border region.

## **1.1 *Having Your Say* Programme**

It is in this context and informed by a consultation process that the Combat Poverty Agency initiated the *Having Your Say* Programme. Work on developing the Programme commenced in March 2005. A schedule of semi-structured consultations were undertaken to inform and guide the three-year programme. These consultations were undertaken with a range of groups and organisations working with community development, local development and anti-poverty groups. Informed by this process an overarching aim and objectives were agreed, key activities were identified, a work programme was developed and structures were put in place.

### **The overall aim of the Programme is:**

To strengthen the policy voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty

### **The objectives are :**

- To promote the right of people in poverty to influence and participate in public policy decisions that affect them;
- To initiate or support work that enhances the policy skills and capacities of groups of people experiencing poverty, their representatives or organisations supporting them;
- To work in partnership with policy-makers to increase their understanding of the issues related to, and implications of, involving people in poverty in policy making; and
- To strengthen the integration of anti-poverty practice by community and voluntary organisations into the policy advice role of Combat Poverty.

Under these objectives, a key action is to examine the feasibility of establishing and supporting a three-year policy-learning network with:

- Family Resource Centres (FRCs) in the Family and Community Services Resource Centres' Programme

- Community Development Programme (CDP) Projects
- Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP).

In this initiative, Combat Poverty is keen to have the active collaboration of the key national institutions supporting these Programmes i.e.:

- Family Support Agency
- Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and
- Pobal.

Members of the above structures are members of the Advisory Group established to support the *Having Your Say Programme*.

## **1.2 Consultative Seminar and Roundtable**

In order to progress the thinking regarding a potential policy-learning network the Combat Poverty Agency hosted a consultative seminar and a roundtable in Dublin on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March and Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2006. The overall purpose of these events was to raise discussion on the policy learning support needs of community based anti-poverty groups and to consider the feasibility of a Policy Learning Network (PLN) as an appropriate response.

### **Aims and Hoped for Outcomes of Seminar and Roundtable**

- a) That the two events present the first step in providing a forum to engage and dialogue on anti-poverty policy learning needs and the idea of a Policy Learning Network as a response to identified needs.
- b) That there will be an indication or commitment from the roundtable participants of which organisations/groups wish to continue to be associated with the initiative in a developmental and partnership way.

An independent facilitator and note taker were present at the consultative seminar and roundtable and this report is a record of these discussions. It is structured as follows:

Section One: Background

Section Two: Report of Day One

Section Three: Report of Day Two

Section Four: Summary and Conclusions.

## SECTION TWO: CONSULTATIVE SEMINAR-DAY ONE

### 2. Introduction

The consultative seminar was held on Monday 20th March in the Park Inn Hotel in Smithfield in Dublin. Invitees to the seminar were participants in the Community Development Programme (CDP), Family Resource Centres (FRCs) and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP). The event took place from 11.30 to 4.00 pm, and was attended by 15 participants including members of all three programmes and Combat Poverty staff <sup>1</sup>.

The structure of the seminar:

Pre-lunch focused on policy learning needs

Post-lunch focused on the idea of a policy-learning network.

The seminar began with a short presentation given by Barbara Walshe of the Combat Poverty Agency outlining its role and the rationale and background to the *Having Your Say Programme*. The presentation gave a brief overview of the origin of the Programme, which came from the needs highlighted in the previous *Combat Poverty Practice to Policy Programme*. Following this programme, consultation with a range of groups and organisations working with community development, local development and anti-poverty groups was undertaken and from these discussions came a number of relevant findings.

The broad findings relating to policy engagement highlighted were:

- Policy-making is not seen as a core part of work- role understanding, capacity issues and structural barriers contribute to this
- Limited knowledge of policy environment-indicating a need for training in understanding the structures and processes of policy making as well as the skills to engage with these
- Different sectors e.g. public sector and community and voluntary sectors have limited knowledge of each other. In addition there is a desire for

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<sup>1</sup> see appendices for list of attendees

- greater solidarity across the community and voluntary sectors, this could necessitate a focus on issues rather than specific target groups.
- Different levels of engagement and skills- varying levels exist within the community and voluntary sector. Opportunities for networking and collaboration offer possibilities for increasing engagement and developing skills within the sector
  - Seen as domain of elected representatives- communities and their organisations emphasised a sense of a lack of power and aligned to this an inability to affect change through local structures. Also, the uneven distribution of power between the community and voluntary sector and the State in the area of policy making was identified
  - Capacity building for community workers in policy processes- it was agreed that the capacity of the community and voluntary sector should be built in the areas of research, policy and social analysis in order to develop links between participative and representative structures.

The presentation also highlighted the policy learning needs and these are discussed below.

## 2.1 Policy Learning Needs Discussion

Following the brief presentation, participants working in small groups addressed prescribed questions concerning Policy Learning Needs. The questions were as follows:

- a) In the three programmes, (CDP, FRCs, LDSIP) who are the priority target participants for policy learning?
- b) Are the needs identified (in the presentation) in line with your own understanding?
- c) Is there added value in a formal needs assessment (to obtain baseline information) of policy learning needs (from the target participants)?
- d) If yes, how might this be carried out?

The feedback and subsequent plenary is documented below.

2.1.  
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### Potential Target Participants

There was consensus amongst the participants that differing levels of needs were present within and between the three programmes. The groups suggested a number of possible targets for policy learning, these included:

1. Boards/Management Committees – Where a board or management committee structure is present, participants felt that members of these boards should be targeted for policy learning.
2. Staff Members – Reference here was made to the differing levels of knowledge regarding policy within organisations, and the need for the training of members of staff in areas relating to policy influencing.
3. Community Groups – Many participants felt there existed a need to involve those people who worked ‘on the ground’ in the area of policy learning.

4. Volunteers – The groups also felt that the contribution of volunteers could be strengthened through targeted policy learning.

### Broader Issues

As stated previously participants stressed the differing needs of individuals and groups in each programme. However, there was agreement on the overarching need for greater clarity with regard to policymaking and structures at all levels. Participants felt that policy learning and training should be an integral part of all programmes to enable effective consultation and participation.

However it was also stressed that uncertainty existed within projects and groups regarding their respective roles in policy influencing and formation. Whilst on occasion this may arise from lack of knowledge and/or capacity there were broader structural issues that needed to be addressed. For example, the CDPs saw the decision to remove policy workers from their programme as an increasing shift from policy to service delivery. It was also stressed that the role of the Support Agencies in relation to policy work needed clarification.

### **2.1.2 Identifying Policy Needs**

The presentation mentioned above outlined the following policy learning needs:

- Make links between representative and participative structures
- Building understanding between Community and Voluntary sectors
- More information sharing needed on the type and focus of policy related work undertaken by the anti-poverty sector
- Highlight difference between service delivery and policy analysis
- Communicate clear, concise and consistent policy messages and preferences for policy outcomes
- Improving links between local experience of policy implementation and national policy development
- Addressing power issues in local inter-agency structures
- Better research, policy and social analysis skills.

It was largely agreed amongst participants that the needs identified in the presentation were comprehensive and in line with their own experiences. Consensus was also reached regarding the need for greater clarity regarding mechanisms for engagement and each programmes role in policy-making processes.

In addition to the needs identified in the Combat Poverty presentation, participants stated a number of further needs:

- Respectful formalised relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sectors, for example a written accord based on the British COMPACT model.
- Definition and commitment by the State regarding the present and future role of each group in policy influencing and formation. In particular, CDP projects expressed a desire for a 'political guarantee' regarding its engagement with policy.
- Participants also stressed the need for greater resources to be made available for policy work and the support of a policy focus within programmes.

### **2.1.3 The Possible Value And Structure Of A Formal Needs Assessment**

The value of a formal needs assessment received differing responses. Some participants felt that the needs identified from the *Practice to Policy Programme* were sufficient. Others felt an alternative source of baseline information could be obtained through a mapping exercise. These responses reflected the position among many participants that many groups felt over-researched and remain unconvinced of the necessity for further assessment. Further discussion also highlighted the desire for a developmental approach to needs assessment and one, which ensured findings are fed back to all key stakeholders. Some participants favoured an action research approach to such research. Generally it was agreed that not sufficient documented information existed regarding the

current level of policy engagement by members of the three programmes and that this could form part of the proposed mapping exercise.

The recommendations proposed reflect the participants' desire for the utilisation of existing information. These included:

- Mapping of policy making structures at a local, regional and national level
- Mapping of current policy engagement by members of the three programmes
- Mapping of capacities and support needs of local organisations
- A review of existing research in the area.

Recommendations for possible methodologies:

- The use of 'Creative Methodologies' to obtain information
- The use of 'Co-operative enquiry methodology'
- The use of 'Action research methodology'
- Feeding back of information from research back to groups
- Peer learning.

Participants were supportive of the idea of a mapping exercise as they felt that the collation of existing data into a useful and readily available body of information would be of benefit.

## **2.2 Policy Learning Network (PLN)**

The second part of the day commenced with a brief presentation by Joan O'Flynn of the Combat Poverty Agency around the issue of a Policy Learning Network (PLN). This presentation outlined the rationale and background to the proposed PLN. It was clearly stated to participants that the concept of a PLN was unprescribed and came about as an initial response to the aforementioned identified needs. The aim of a PLN was defined as:

*“Supporting relationships and contacts between community based anti-poverty organisations for mutual benefit with the purpose of strengthening knowledge, understanding, skills and capacities relating to public policy relevant to poverty and social inclusion”*

The presentation also outlined some **potential activities** of a PLN:

- Needs assessment
- Develop learning goals/outcomes
- Policy education materials
- Group learning
- Independent learning
- Networking events – national/regional workshops, skills training, policy seminars etc.

Also highlighted were the **potential benefits** of a PLN. These included:

- A structure for collective learning
- Transfer of policy learning within and across programmes
- Transfer of policy learning back into community based anti-poverty groups
- Providing a cross-programme forum for policy debate and discussion.

Some **potential learning methodologies** were proposed, these included:

- Peer learning/ Self-managed learning groups
- Experiential learning that is learning by doing
- Lecture style inputs
- Group work
- Action Learning (based on ‘actual’ policy work)
- Mentoring
- Web-based learning.

A number of **potential structures** for a Policy Learning Network were also discussed such as a collaborative planning group including members of the three programmes, the Combat Poverty Agency, DCRAAG, Pobal and Family Support Agency.

## **Reflection and Discussion on Policy Learning Network**

Groups discussed prescribed questions concerning the development of a Policy Learning Network. The questions were as follows:

- a) What might be the benefits and challenges?
- b) What might be its overall purpose?
- c) What activities might it undertake?
- d) Who would be involved?
- e) What structures are required to (i) develop and (ii) maintain it?
- f) Are there other models/ responses to meeting policy learning needs?

The feedback and subsequent plenary is documented below

### **2.2.1 Possible Benefits, Challenges And Purpose of A Policy Learning Network**

The idea of a Policy Learning Network (PLN) received a lot of interest among participants. There was a positive reaction to the concepts set out in the presentation, which described the possible role of a PLN as a developmental and learning tool for the three programmes.

Participants favoured the future function of a PLN as; enabling the collaboration of groups, facilitating the development of a competence around policy in the sector, and communicating information to all levels.

A number of participants stressed the importance of using existing structures to inform the possible development of a PLN and to avoid duplication. The role of community fora was raised but it was agreed that these are still being developed and that further information is required regarding their inclusion of a strong anti-poverty focus. Combat.

Poverty advised that it would be shortly publishing research into this issue.

## Benefits

The groups listed a number of possible benefits of a PLN, these included

- A large range of participants which would allow for the possibility of networking among the three LDSIP, CDP and FRCs programmes
- Integration with policy for all levels of participants within each programme.

## Challenges

Overall there was agreement that a large amount of planning was required before a PLN could be developed. Participants were concerned about the possible duplication of existing structures and the difficulties of a PLN to be inclusive and equal, encompassing the work of those on the ground as well as those who formulate policies.

- An inclusive structure
- Attaining equality amongst participants
- The pitch, ensuring accessibility to all including importance of avoiding jargon whilst explaining core concepts
- Ensuring clear feedback mechanisms to groups.

### **2.2.2 Possible Activities And Actors Involved**

Participants agreed that before possible activities could be decided upon further work was required on the structure and role of a PLN. Groups did propose however it would include members/representatives of CDPs, FRCs and LDSIP and of relevant state agencies.

### **2.2.3 Structures Required To (i) Develop And (ii) Maintain A Policy Learning Network**

Participants proffered a number of possible methods of developing and maintaining a PLN.

The proposed structures required for the development of a PLN included:

- A planning group to be comprised of a wide range of participants from the three programmes and relevant state agencies.
- A number of participants also favoured the involvement of those present at the 2005 *Having Your Say National Conference*
- A 'clear terms of reference'
- A formal memorandum of principles agreed between participants.

The proposed methods of maintaining a PLN included:

- The use of an independent facilitator for planning meetings
- Independent monitoring of agreed terms of reference
- The use of existing structures e.g. regional fora
- Regional meetings
- Feed back of information to groups through regular reports.

Participants also suggested an approach based on a number of regional 'Pilot Models' in selected areas focussed around specific issues.

### **2.3 Next Steps and Conclusion**

The session concluded with a number of commitments on behalf of Combat Poverty including a commitment to the programme until the end of 2007, which is the end of their current strategic plan. This includes a budgetary and management commitment, staff support and a formative and summative evaluation process which could offer support to the Policy Learning Network as part of the broader *Having Your Say* evaluation. Participants wished to be kept in touch and involved with the next steps in the development of the initiative and requested that the report be forwarded as soon as possible so that it could be discussed at local, regional and national level. It was agreed this would be circulated within 3-4 weeks.

## **SECTION THREE: ROUND TABLE -DAY TWO**

### **3. Introduction**

As the second part of the consultative process Combat Poverty hosted a 'round table' on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March. The invitees to this session were representatives of the government departments and agencies supporting the CDP, the FRCs and the LDSIP. This included the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Pobal and the Family Support Agency<sup>2</sup>. Six participants attended including representatives from the three department/agencies outlined above as well as staff of the Combat Poverty Agency.

The session ran from 2.00 – 4.30 pm and was held in the Combat Poverty offices in Islandbridge, Dublin. The two and a half hour session included the same two brief presentations and the discussion focused on the same questions as Day One. The format took more the form of a facilitated discussion rather than a workshop approach. This was due both to smaller numbers and shorter time.

The central aim of the roundtable was the same as the consultative seminar, that is to raise discussion on the policy learning support needs of community based anti-poverty groups and on the concept of a Policy Learning Network as an appropriate response.

#### **3.1 Policy Learning Needs Discussion**

Following a brief presentation given by Barbara Walshe of the Combat Poverty Agency (see Report of Day 1 for more detail), the discussion focused on 1) potential target participants, 2) identified needs and 3) further formal needs assessment.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendices for list of attendees.

### **3.1.1 Potential Target Participants**

Participants felt that there were differing levels of understanding and expertise in the area of policy across the sector. It was suggested that at a local level as compared to national level there was less formal understanding of policy and in some cases lack of clarity surrounding the role of groups in policy influencing.

Suggested priority target participants included staff members at local level of each Programme where it was felt that varying levels of expertise and knowledge exist. It was also suggested that statutory workers had learning needs in the area of policy. It was felt that due to the nature of employment across government departments, (including the fact that individuals changed departments and sections) there existed gaps in understanding and experience of policy formation and the role of different potential influencers.

### **3.1.2 Identifying Policy Needs**

A number of different views regarding the needs identified in the presentation were put forward. The majority agreed that these reflected the current situation. A counter view argued that some community groups are very skilled in policy engagement. It was argued that local groups have in fact influenced policy and view policy activity as a core part of their work. It was also highlighted that others engage in activities that relate to policy but this may not be recognised as 'policy work'. The successful provision of financing, resources as well as capacity building in relation to policy engagement as part of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme was seen to have had positive outcomes. However it was generally agreed that there was insufficient documentation regarding the policy work of members of the three programmes.

A number of additional issues were also identified. Participants felt that in order to meet varying policy learning needs sufficient resources were required. There was widespread consensus amongst participants that there was a need to build on existing structures and previous successes.

It was also agreed that training and policy learning for civil servants was needed as well as support and training approaches to engage with representatives from community and anti-poverty groups in the policy process.

### **3.1.3 The Possible Value And Structure Of A Formal Needs Assessment**

Participants felt that a deeper needs assessment was required. It was also stressed that the needs assessment be developmental in nature as opposed to a mere paper exercise. It was highlighted that there was considerable knowledge and experience within and amongst local groups that had not been quantified.

As with participants of day one this group felt that a mapping or 'scoping exercise' with a wider remit than assessment of policy learning needs was required.

The following perceived benefits to a scoping exercise were outlined, these included:

- the provision of an evidence base for further policy capacity building
- documentation of 'good practice' in relation to policy work
- credible evidence of the level of experience existent in programmes
- identification of current learning opportunities.
- an opportunity to gauge opinion regarding a possible Policy Learning Network

### **3.2 Policy Learning Network**

Following the brief presentation by Joan O'Flynn of the Combat Poverty Agency (see Day One Report), participants discussed prescribed questions concerning the development of a Policy Learning Network. These questions were the same as those asked of participants from Day One.

### **3.2.1 Possible Benefits, Challenges And Purpose Of A Policy Learning Network**

The concept of a policy-learning network received a favourable reaction from participants. However it was felt that the development of such a network was not feasible at this juncture. Participants suggested that before a PLN could be developed it was necessary to complete the scoping document outlined above. This would guide its development and direction. As the discussion developed participants favoured the idea of a 'policy learning initiative' rather than prescribing a network at this juncture. This was also based on concerns with duplication/overlap with existing Networks as well as possible excessive time commitments required of potential members.

Participants suggested a number of benefits and challenges to developing a form of policy learning initiative.

#### **Benefits**

- An opportunity for those who formulate policy to view its application at a local level
- Possible better connection between CDP and FRCs with LDSIPs
- Greater interaction between sponsors and local groups
- Such initiatives can facilitate policy thinking for groups.

However, participants had reservations and also listed a number of possible challenges.

#### **Challenges**

- Based on previous experience possible challenge of the three programmes interfacing
- Lack of resources for engagement
- Issues relating to the clarity of the role of representatives from the differing programmes.

It was agreed that in the period post National Development Plan 2006, a policy learning initiative would be an opportunity to integrate existing programmes and possibly address the gaps in the development of local policy.

### 3.2.2 Possible Activities And Actors Involved

A number of possible activities for a policy learning initiative were enumerated, these included:

- The identification of institutional policy frameworks
- Documentation of needs, shortfalls and good practice within the sector
- Highlighting the link between the work programmes are doing and their influence on policy.

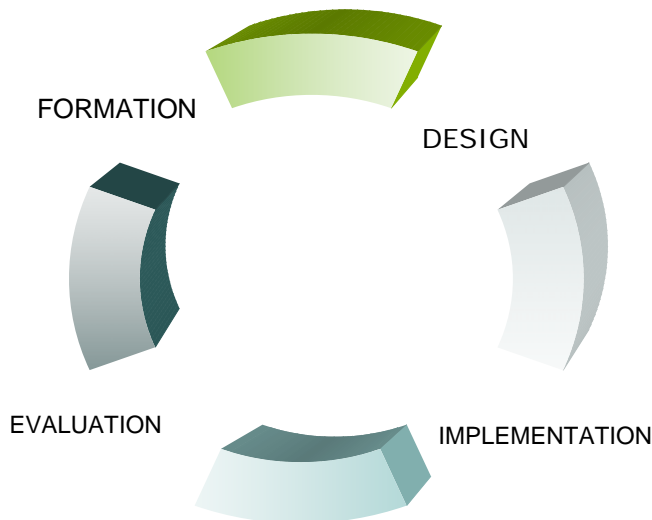
Reference was made to the 'virtuous circle' of policy making which includes:

(i) Formation

(ii) Design

(iii) Implementation

(iv) Evaluation



This circle was seen as a possible model for the basis of a policy learning initiative.

It was suggested that in addition to members from the three programmes and the sponsors, members of other relevant networks could also play a role in the initiative for example the National Anti-Poverty Networks.

### **3.2.3 Structures Required To (i) Develop And (ii) Maintain**

Participants agreed that in order to develop a policy learning initiative, a partnership approach was required including widespread consultation with key stakeholders.

In order to successfully develop and maintain a policy learning initiative, participants suggested the following

- Incorporate members of the three participant programmes, sponsor department/agencies, Combat Poverty Agency and other relevant actors into a planning group; it was proposed that one person from each programme and one from each statutory agency be present.
- Secure practical support for and involvement of the target programmes and sponsors
- Employ an independent facilitator for the planning meetings
- Devise an agreed 'terms of reference'
- Draft and agree a formal accord /memorandum between participants
- Following establishment of the planning group agree purpose, aims and hoped for outcomes.

### **3.3 Next Steps and Conclusion**

Participants proposed a number of next steps for the advancement of the mapping/scoping exercise and policy learning initiative. These included establishing a planning group including participants as outlined above and the refinement of the brief for the scoping exercise.

Participants proposed a date for the first meeting of a planning group- the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at 2.00 in the Combat Poverty offices. Other steps to be taken included contacting other proposed members of the planning group and preparation and circulation of draft headings of a scoping document before the planning meeting. The management and support staff of the *Having A Say Programme* will contact other potential members of the planning group to prepare the draft headings for a mapping exercise on policy engagement across the CDP, FRCP and LDSIP.

## **SECTION FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

### **4. Introduction**

The following briefly summarises the key points from both the consultative seminar and the roundtable. These are organised under the two main areas of concern of the discussions i.e. policy learning needs and a policy learning network as a possible response. Commonalities across the two days are highlighted as well as points of difference. Finally proposed future steps in bringing forward the ideas are outlined.

### **4.1 Policy Learning Needs**

#### **4.1.1 Policy Engagement** (by members of the three programmes)

The following points were broadly supported by both groups of participants

- The importance of engagement by members of the three programmes in the policy process
- The importance of support for this by the sponsors of the programmes
- The importance of adequate resourcing of this engagement
- The need for training and capacity building to support this engagement
- The need for equality between the partners in any potential initiative in this regard and in particular between members of the three programmes and the sponsors

However participants in Day One (particularly from CDPs) stressed the need to re-clarify the role of CDPs in policy influencing work. A perception exists at CDP level that the sponsoring Department views their role as predominantly in service provision. The withdrawal of policy workers from CDPs was indicated as evidence of this shift in emphasis.

It was also stressed on Day One that a formal agreement or accord based on respectful relationships would be necessary to underlie co-operation in any initiative. This was agreed as necessary on Day Two also.

A key issue highlighted was the lack of engagement by many community groups with the policy process due at least in part to the centralisation of the policy process in government structures.

#### **4.1.2 Target Participants and Policy Learning Needs**

Again there was broad agreement that policy learning needs exist amongst members of the three Programmes. Also that considerable differences exist between members of the Programmes and also within Programmes depending on the specific project and also on whether the focus is on Board members, paid staff or volunteers.

The potential target groups varied slightly, with participants on day one including Board members, paid staff, volunteers and 'on the ground' community based groups. Whilst Day Two participants stressed paid staff and also highlighted policy learning needs on the part of individuals in relevant statutory agencies and governments departments.

#### **4.1.3 Formal Needs Assessment**

There was some diversity of views regarding the need for a formal needs assessment between the two days, with participants on Day One less convinced that this was necessary. Many felt that the needs already identified in the *Practice to Policy* work as well as the consultations for the *Having a Say Programme* sufficed.

However there was broad agreement that there was a value in conducting a mapping /scoping exercise which would have a broader remit than needs assessment. It was agreed that there was a lack of research which documented the policy engagement already undertaken by members of the three Programmes and that much could be learned from this. It was suggested that a

mapping/scoping exercise could include this research in addition to collecting information on specific policy learning needs amongst different stakeholders. It was also felt that approaches to meeting the needs could also be addressed. Participants on Day Two also stressed the importance of mapping the policy learning supports already existing in the three Programmes.

Participants from day one emphasised the need for the mapping exercise to build on existing research and practice and to employ the use of differing methodologies including developmental processes and action research. They also felt that further research had little benefit unless the findings, recommendations and actions were fed back to the groups involved in the three Programmes.

#### **4.2 Policy Learning Network**

Participants from both roundtables acknowledged the need for some form of a policy learning network/initiative. It was felt that there was a great benefit to bringing the three Programmes together whilst also recognising the challenges attached to this.

As already stated there were some reservations on both days about the concept of a formal network so it was concluded by day two to refer to the idea at this stage as a policy learning initiative. It was emphasised that every effort be made to ensure complementarity with existing structures and to avoid overlap or duplication.

Both groups agreed on the importance of drafting a terms of reference for any policy learning initiative and the monitoring of the implementation of these. It was also suggested that a formal memorandum be drawn up confirming the principles of equality between the partners in the initiative and developing mechanisms to ensure that these were put into operation. This was particularly

stressed by the participants on day one. It was also agreed that an independent facilitator would be contracted for the planning meetings.

In terms of membership again there was broad agreement that all three programmes, the sponsoring departments/agencies and the Combat Poverty Agency be involved. It was also suggested that other relevant anti-poverty groups be involved e.g. the National Anti-Poverty Networks and participants from the *Having Your Say Programme*.

The need for the resourcing of participants was stressed as well as the need to ensure accessibility for all in terms of structures, mechanisms and language.

It was felt that until a planning group came together and until the mapping/scoping exercise was completed it was not advisable to agree aims or activities.

#### **4.3 Steps To Carry The Initiative Forward**

Participants on day one agreed that they would support and where possible be involved in bringing the initiative forward. They requested the report of the seminar and round table be forwarded to them as soon as possible and they would circulate this to their members. Participants on day two agreed to an initial meeting of a planning group comprised of the sponsors, members from the three programmes and Combat Poverty. The date proposed is 15<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at 2.00 in Combat Poverty. It was further proposed that the *Having Your Say Programme* staff, sponsoring agencies of the three Programmes and some members of the three Programmes would meet prior to this to draft headings for the proposed mapping/scoping exercise for discussion at the meeting if 15<sup>th</sup> May.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Broadly the aims of the seminar and roundtable were met with a considerable level of shared understanding, amongst participants across both sessions,

regarding the policy learning needs of members of the three Programmes. There was also agreement on the need for a mapping/ scoping exercise to establish current levels of engagement, factors which support or hinder this, outcomes from this engagement as well as identification of further policy learning needs and possible responses to meeting these. There was also support for the concept of a policy learning initiative involving the three Programmes, their sponsors and the Combat Poverty Agency. The overall purpose and direction of this to be informed by the mapping exercise above. A number of next steps were agreed to bring the initiative forward.

## List of Attendees

### Day 1

	Name	Organisation	Programme
1	Breda McNamara	Ballymun Men's Centre	CDP
2	Ann Kelly	Bridge CDP	CDP
3	Martin Kelly	Bridge CDP	CDP
4	Barbara Walsh	Combat Poverty Agency	
5	Joan O'Flynn	Combat Poverty Agency	
6	Paula Fitzpatrick	Combat Poverty Agency	
7	Noreen Colgan	Co-Operation Fingal	Community Partnership
8	Kathleen O'Neill	Kilbarrack CDP	CDP
9	Geraldine O'Driscoll	North Wall Women's Centre	CDP
10	Tony O'Grady	Partners CDP	CDP
11	Mary Sheehy	Partnership Cork	Partnership
12	Claire Casey	Ringsend Action Project	CDP
13	Sharon Kennedy	South West Wexford	CDP
14	Dick Hickey	St. Brigid's FRC	FRC
15	Rose Todd	Waterford Women's Centre	CDP

### Day 2

	Name		Programme
	Clodagh McDonall	Dept. Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	CDP/LDSIP
	Aidan Lloyd	Pobal	LDSIP
	Pat Bennett	Family Support Agency	FRCP
	Barbara Walshe	Combat Poverty Agency	
	Joan O'Flynn	Combat Poverty Agency	
	Sharon Cosgrove	Combat Poverty Agency	