

POVERTY TODAY

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**A New Adequacy
Benchmark for
Welfare Payments**

**Equality Does
Matter**



- New Local Government Bill
- Models for Involvement
- European Social Policy
- Traveller Accommodation
- Health Targets for NAPS

Combat Poverty Agency
working for the prevention
and elimination of poverty



Equality Does Matter

AIDAN LLOYD

Equality legislation, and the mechanisms that legislation puts in place to monitor, promote and enforce equality, are crucial instruments in the development and maintenance of a just society. Equality measures are at times driven by issues internal to the state – like making provision for maternity leave from employment; at other times the agenda comes from a developing global consensus that there are certain human rights that stand above the 'negotiation frameworks' of conventional democracy. Women's rights, the rights of gay people and the right not to be subjected to 'degrading and inhuman treatment' have all been important milestones in the development of a just society. Whatever the source, equality legislation is of central importance to individuals and groups experiencing inequality, social exclusion and discrimination.

Equality is not a rigidly time-fixed concept: notions of equality and rights are constantly developing. What was regarded as fair treatment in the past would be regarded with horror today. One could apply the 'hierarchy of need' paradigm in this respect - as one equality need gets fulfilled it identifies other needs which stand out in this more just scenario. The right to divorce or the right of women to remain in employment after marriage would not now be regarded as extraordinary or extreme. Yet at the time of their proposition they were firmly opposed by a vocal minority, including a minority of journalists who trivialised and ridiculed the introduction of legislation to safeguard these fundamental rights.

EQUALITY SHOULD NOT BE TRIVIALISED

In recent times the Equality Authority and the Commissioner for Equality have been subject to considerable attention from elements in the media. This has taken the form of criticism of recent cases taken by the Commissioner's office on demeaning treatment on the compulsory wearing of uniforms by women, and the

advertising of jobs by Ryanair, which appeared to exclude people on the basis of age. Most of this criticism challenged the 'over political correctness' of the Equality Authority. The fact that this is the responsibility of the Commissioner, rather than the Authority, appears to have been lost on some of the journalists and broadcasters.

Trivialising is a strategy more usually applied to women; the feminist movement was undermined in this manner in the 1960s and 1970s. Exaggeration, particularly the depiction of extreme hypothetical situations, appears to be the current mode in relation to age/disability discrimination and prohibiting practices demeaning to women.

The tactic employed by this minority of broadcasters and journalists is familiar: most came up with extreme, and often-inaccurate scenarios to justify departing from what they portray as an over-zealous equality strategy. Ryanair itself stepped in with the traditional 'merit' argument i.e. that imposing equality measures interferes with getting the best person for the job - conveniently ignoring that the legislation leaves plenty of room for merit, being concerned solely with creating a level playing field.

The scenarios advanced were often quite bizarre. David Quinn (Editor of the Irish Catholic), on Questions and Answers, cited instances where an age stipulation could be justified on the basis that a company may want to recruit someone for a long term employment commitment of 20 or 30 years. As an advocate of the market economy, one would assume that David would regard long term contracting as anathema, but even if he doesn't he should know that such a scenario simply doesn't exist anymore. Another argument put forward alluded to the unsuitability of older people due to their lack of dynamism. Once again stereotypical assertions were made which simply do not stand up to scrutiny.

EQUALITY IS NOT 'OUTRAGEOUS'

This type of inaccurate comment, which seeks to prevent people from accessing opportunities where they can escape poverty or equalise their social position, is in the same vein as comments made some months ago about people with a disability. In both cases attempts were made to demonstrate how outrageous such demands for equality are. The tactic is to exaggerate, trivialise or demonise the target group; Travellers continue to be demonised, as do refugee communities.

It is easy to forget that most people have some level of personal relationship with the categories of people covered by the Equality Legislation. They may be relatives or friends, or they may constitute a group that is the focus of local community action. So there is a silent majority who need to speak out, and community organisations need to be conscious of their role in articulating that voice. The Equality Authority should not be intimidated by media attacks on its integrity and should hold to its strategy of pushing out the legislation's scope and extent.

The backlash by minority elements in the media over equality issues is neither new nor unexpected. It merely demonstrates that social change is always resisted initially and that one must bear the onslaught of a vociferous minority whose arguments are neither real nor sensible. Those who believe in the importance of such legislation must continue to make their arguments and not be distracted by such isolated and irrational attacks. Perhaps in this instance the venom with which equality advocates are met is a measure of how important and potentially radical the equality legislation is.

Aidan Lloyd is Vice-chairperson of the Community Workers' Co-Operative.



NAPS, NAPIncl and an Adequate Income for All

Hugh Frazer | Director of Combat Poverty Agency

- 2 EQUALITY DOES MATTER
Aidan Lloyd
- 3 VIEWPOINT
Hugh Frazer
- 4 ISSUES IN SETTING A MINIMUM
INCOME STANDARD
Jim Walsh
- 6 STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF
LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN TACKLING
POVERTY
*OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH LOCAL
GOVERNMENT BILL*
Clare Farrell
- 7 A COUNCILLOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON
NEW LOCAL GOVERNMENT ANTI-
POVERTY WORK
Cllr. Tom Wood
- 8 TOWARDS EFFECTIVE
INVOLVEMENT OF EXCLUDED
GROUPS
James McGowan
- 10 REVIEWING PROGRESS ON
TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION
Davy Joyce
- 11 DEVELOPING HEALTH TARGETS
FOR NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY
STRATEGY
Dr Jim Kiely
- 13 EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY
GATHERS PACE
Brian Harvey
- 14 NOTICEBOARD
- 15 BOOKS AND REPORTS
Joe Larragy
- 16 ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
Les Allamby

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The next few months are a critically important period for Irish and European anti-poverty policy. By 1st June this year all member states are due to submit a National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion (NAPIncl) to the EU Commission (see article by Brian Harvey). Parallel to this, the review of Ireland's National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) is currently underway and is due to be finalised by September.

While the NAPS process will take slightly longer than NAPIncl, it is intended that the June submission to the Commission will refer to the NAPS review process and will indicate that elements of NAPIncl may be changed or elaborated on once the NAPS review is completed. Thereafter future plans submitted to the EU will be consistent with and contingent upon the findings of the NAPS review. It is also intended that the NAPS review in September will be structured, as far as possible, around the draft outline provided by the European Commission. Thus over time the two processes should gradually merge. This is very significant as it means that in future the NAPS will be enriched by learning from and being compared with best anti-poverty practice throughout the EU. It should also bring a greater emphasis and rigour to setting and monitoring anti-poverty indicators and targets. The importance of these developments is difficult to overstate. It is vital that everyone concerned about tackling poverty and social exclusion takes every opportunity to contribute to the preparation of NAPIncl and to the NAPS review process. All actors, especially those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, must be fully involved at all stages of the process. It is encouraging that the EU guidelines specifically promote such involvement.

What ends up in NAPIncl and the next phase of NAPS (NAPS2) will set the main anti-poverty agenda for the next few years. There are clearly many important policy areas to be covered. However, given the current trends in relation to poverty, one issue stands out: an adequate income for all. The first four years of NAPS has seen very important advances in critically important areas like reducing unemployment and reducing the numbers experiencing long term or consistent poverty. However, the lack of progress on reducing the numbers experiencing relative income poverty (i.e. below 50% or 60% of average household income) has been striking. If NAPS2 and NAPIncl are to be credible then they should contain a clear target for dramatically reducing, if not eliminating, the percentage of persons below 50% of average household income (20.5% in 1998) and achieving a major reduction in the numbers below 60% average household income (30% in 1998).

This is a critically important issue because lifting people out of poverty is about more than just ensuring that everyone has sufficient income to meet basic needs and avoid basic deprivations (which is what is reflected in the current NAPS target for consistent poverty), important though this is. It is about people being able to participate in the normal social, cultural and economic life of society and living life with dignity. This is not possible if people's incomes fall too far below the average. Thus narrowing income gaps must also be a priority for the next phase of Irish anti-poverty policy.

There are of course a number of factors that are critical for achieving such a target. Clearly the key means for ensuring this for most people is a decently paid job. A progressive tax system is also important in ensuring that those on lower incomes are not dragged into the poverty net. Additional support for families with children is also essential. In the longer term improvements in areas like education, training, housing, health and other public services will play a critical role in supporting people to move out of poverty and to earn a decent income. However, some people, through no fault of their own will, be either permanently (e.g. through age or disability), or temporarily (e.g. through illness, family responsibilities, unemployment), be unable to achieve a decent income through work. For them the provision of an adequate level of social welfare is vital.

It is striking that EU Objectives in the Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion include "to organise social protection systems in such a way that they help . . . to guarantee that everyone has the resources necessary to live in accordance with human dignity". We now need to set a minimum income standard that is sufficient to ensure this. This means moving beyond the out of date benchmark set by the Commission on Social Welfare in 1986. It means providing adequate social welfare payments that are related to the very rapid increase in income and earnings in recent years. This is an issue that is currently being examined by a benchmarking working group established under the Programme for Partnership and Prosperity (PPF) and chaired by Professor Kieran Kennedy (see article by Jim Walsh). Exactly how to set a benchmark is a complex issue. However, at the very least the benchmark established must contribute to narrowing income gaps in society, dramatically reducing the numbers below 50% and 60% income poverty lines and ensuring that everyone can participate fully in normal social, cultural and economic life. Long-term reductions in poverty will only be achieved by bringing those on the lowest incomes much closer to average incomes. The social welfare system has a key role to play in ensuring that this is the case. This must be a central priority for NAPS2 and NAPIncl.

Issues in Setting a Minimum Income Standard

JIM WALSH

A key issue in anti-poverty policy is the rate of welfare payments. In effect, this sets the floor for household income and is therefore central to improving the position of most, though not all, poor people. The benchmark for the last two decades was the 'minimally adequate' figure recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare in 1986. Thirteen years afterwards this figure was surpassed for all welfare payments in the 1999 Budget. This target figure was hugely important in welfare policy. It set a clear policy objective in place of the ad hoc improvements that had previously dominated. It resulted in percentage increases for welfare recipients ahead of inflation and (frequently) wages. It reduced the differential between various welfare categories, targeting those on the lowest payments. Recent Budgets have reverted to a more fragmented approach, with greater divergence in rates between different categories, as well as variable levels of increase each year.

THE NEED FOR A NEW ADEQUACY BENCHMARK

Since the Commission's minimally adequate target has been reached, the question is whether we need to set a new standard or simply to rely on incremental improvements. There is a number of reasons why a new benchmark is needed:

- the growth in the resources available to government;
- the widening disparity between earnings and welfare increases during economic growth;
- the higher gains accruing to taxpayers arising from recent Budgets;
- the persistence of high rates of relative income poverty, with increased risk of poverty for certain categories (eg pensioners);
- the establishment of a new income benchmark, the minimum wage.

This need was highlighted by the NESC in its review of economic and social policy (1999). Subsequently, under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, the government and the social partners

agreed to a working group to examine the issues involved in developing a new benchmark and an ongoing uprating mechanism for welfare payments. This review is underway, with an interim report due in April and a final report in July.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY AN ADEQUACY BENCHMARK?

A first step is to clarify what is meant by a minimum adequate income and how it differs from a relative income poverty line on one hand and a guaranteed minimum income on the other. A minimum adequate income is a political criterion of the adequacy of income levels for some minimum real level of living, and is embodied in a formal administrative instrument (Veit-Wilson, 1998). By contrast, a relative income poverty line is a statistical measurement of those falling below various thresholds of income inequality. It says little about the living standards experienced at these thresholds. Meanwhile, a guaranteed minimum income represents the lowest rate available through the welfare system. In Ireland, this welfare safety net is provided through Supplementary Welfare. In practice, a minimum income standard may be different from a relative income poverty line/basic welfare payment. It can encompass minimum wage rates, tax thresholds, long-term welfare benefits and short-term payments.

A RIGHTS' PERSPECTIVE ON A MINIMUM ADEQUATE INCOME

An adequate income benchmark is especially relevant from a social rights' perspective. In recent years, various international agreements have set out basic social and economic rights. One example is the EU recommendation on a minimum income in 1992, in the EU Charter of Fundamental Social Rights. This advocated *the basic right of a person to sufficient resources and social assistance to live in a manner compatible with human dignity as part of a comprehensive and consistent drive to combat social exclusion*.

Now the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is considering the introduction of a right to an adequate standard of living. This would encompass

subsistence items (eg food, clothing), general provision for living standards (ie social welfare) and social and civic care. A similar right, targeted specifically at children, is in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This states: *the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development*.

The specification of the right to an adequate living standard for children has important implications given the norm of allocating children a proportion of an adult welfare rate. A minimum adequate benchmark for adults and separately for children represents the practical application of this social right. Hence, the guidelines for the EU minimum income recommendation require that governments fix the amount of resources considered sufficient to meet basic needs. Thus, an essential requirement of Irish society is the enactment of a minimum income standard to guide policy-making.

KEY CRITERIA IN SETTING A MINIMUM INCOME STANDARD

There are two basic options: adequacy can be measured by reference to the basic subsistence costs of living, or it can be judged in relation to prevailing living standards. Subsistence costs, calculated by a budget standard approach, is often seen as the most straightforward method. Typically, it includes food, clothing, housing and transport. An Irish example is the Combat Poverty Agency's study on the costs of a child (Carney et al, 1994). The alternative sees the function of a minimum income standard as being to enable participation in society. This was the position espoused by the Commission on Social Welfare.

In practice, adequacy can be measured in a number of ways:

- in relation to what the labour market provides through earnings;
- by comparison with socially-defined living standards (obtained through social surveys);
- by reference to administrative criteria (tax thresholds, minimum wage, fostercare rates);
- through use of a budget standard approach to calculate basic living standards.

In addition to the question of adequate for what, a second issue is adequate for whom. Are we talking about everyone in society or just a sub-set? Frequently, the use of the term 'minimum' refers to a specific and somehow 'inferior' grouping in society, whether defined as the working class, welfare recipients or simply the poor. Language is crucial here, especially the distinction between a minimum adequate standard (where adequacy applies to all) or an adequate minimum standard (which only applies to a sub-section or even different components of a sub-section, eg elderly vs the unemployed).

Another dimension is the demographic unit (an adult, a couple, parent(s) with dependant children or a child) being examined. To-date, minimum income standards focused on adults, while rates for dependants are derived through equivalence scales. However, these scales are based on traditional assumptions about dependency, income sharing and economies of scale - now increasingly questioned by research findings and social mores.

MINIMUM INCOME STANDARDS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

It is useful to consider the approach to minimum income standards in various EU/OECD countries (Veit-Wilson, 1998). While widely used for policy purposes by governments, application of minimum income standards is not uniform and three tiers exist, based on the relationship with various income thresholds, (See shaded box). Standards have many uses: as guidelines for setting welfare rates, tax thresholds and court maintenance payments, as criteria for assessing the adequacy of payments and as measures for quantifying the level of poverty. In some countries, the standards are taken as de facto measures of minimum adequate incomes.

MONITORING A MINIMUM INCOME STANDARD

A minimum income standard should be actively monitored. This involves three separate activities, beginning with a regular 'rebasings' of the standard (Veit-Wilson, 1998). A minimum income standard should not be seen as set in stone (as was the case with the Commission on Social Welfare's target

Upper tier: related to levels of pay/minimum wages

Belgium, France, Netherlands, Sweden

In France, the minimum income standard is the statutory minimum hourly pay rate (SMIC). It was originally based on subsistence budgets and represents a 'family wage'. The SMIC is updated by changes in prices and wages and can be differentiated from the RMI, France's minimum welfare payment. The SMIC is the cornerstone of government policy.

Middle tier: related to social security benefit

Australia, Finland, New Zealand, Norway

In Finland, the minimum pension for an individual serves as the minimum income standard. It asserts a basic decency-threshold for pensioners, independent of social assistance. The minimum pension informs welfare rates, tax thresholds and maintenance orders. Welfare payments were increased from 44 per cent to 80 per cent of the minimum pension, reflecting a shift from a subsistence to an emphasis on reasonable living standards.

Bottom tier: related to basic welfare rates

Germany, New Zealand, USA

The United States has probably the best-known minimum income standard, the Orshansky Poverty Line. It is based on a budget standard approach, multiplying basic food expenditure by a factor of three. Despite its age (1950s), the standard has never been rebased, just updated by inflation.

figure). It is not realistic to leave a standard unchanged for such a long time, especially given our rapidly changing social and economic circumstances. An official rebasing every 5 years is required, with the option of a more frequent review where change is more dramatic, similar to the regular review of the consumer price index.

A second monitoring exercise is to 'update' the minimum income standard by reference to the rate of inflation or other linked index, eg average industrial wages or minimum wage. This is different to the rebasing task as it would be a straightforward annual calculation based on a previously agreed reference point. A quarterly updating might be appropriate if inflation or wages change dramatically.

Finally, there is an 'uprating' task which relates to the procedure whereby welfare payments are increased in relation to a minimum income standard. This is a government policy decision, which typically is implemented in the context of

the annual Budget. The uprating of welfare payments based on a minimum income standard is likely to be influenced by political and economic considerations.

The Agency is convening a research seminar in late April/early May on minimum income standards. It will include a presentation by John Veit-Wilson, professor of social policy and an expert on minimum income standards. For further information, contact Jim Walsh, Agency Policy Analyst, at 01-6026613 or by email at walshj@cpa.ie.

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Strengthening the Role of Local Opportunities through Local Government Bill

CLARE FARRELL

In May last year the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Noel Dempsey TD, published the Local Government Bill 2000 which he said would 'enhance the fundamental democratic nature of local government'. The Bill runs to over 200 pages and proposes a new statutory framework for the operation of local government. It should therefore be of interest to anyone concerned with the issues of local democracy and the role of local government in tackling poverty.

The Bill was introduced specifically as a follow-up to the constitutional amendment which recognised local government and provided for a fixed five year cycle of local elections. Most people are probably familiar with some of the headline features, including provision for a salary for elected councillors, direct election of the Cathaoirleachs and for the abolition of the dual national/local mandate.

However, the Bill is more wide-ranging. The Combat Poverty Agency believes it presents a timely opportunity to incorporate anti-poverty objectives into local authority functions, and provide a statutory basis for more active citizenship at local level. The Agency has made a submission to Government proposing a series of amendments. But first, what does the Bill set out to do and what are its main proposals?

STATED AIMS

When the Minister launched the Bill he set out four main aims for it;

- To enhance the role of the elected member;
- To support community involvement with local authorities in a more participative democracy;
- To modernise local government legislation and provide the framework for new financial management systems and other procedures to promote efficiency and effectiveness;
- And to underpin generally the programme of local government renewal.

The Bill repeals outdated laws and terminology and provides a statutory framework for the structures, functions and operations of local government. It proposes that in future local authorities be known as county councils, city councils and town councils, replacing the older names. It makes general statements about functions, provides for more flexible arrangements for local authority co-operation and joint service provision, and provides for a corporate plan for county and city councils.

A right of access for members of the public and the media to attend local authority meetings is included and a general ethics framework for councillors and staff is outlined. The Bill also provides a statutory basis for the Strategic Policy Committee structure and recognition of the county/city development boards and their role in drawing up a county/city strategy for economic, social and cultural development. Two new features proposed in the Bill that are worth specific mention are the power to establish a Community Fund (and raise annual contributions to it) to allow local authorities carry out special projects of benefit to the community, and a statutory role for local authorities to pro-actively encourage interest among young people in local democracy.

KEY CONCERNS

The Agency's submissions outlines amendments which arise from our two key concerns about the Bill;

- Firstly a concern to ensure that the forthcoming legislation will reflect and embrace the wider policy context in which social inclusion has become a key government priority, identifying clearly how the local government reform process can apply the approach of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy in a positive and effective way at local level and integrate anti-poverty objectives across its functions.
- Secondly, to ensure that a legislative basis is provided for greater civic participation in local government, particularly among excluded groups and individuals experiencing poverty.

SOCIAL INCLUSION IS KEY

The Agency submission proposes the promotion of social inclusion as a key objective of local authorities and argues that this objective should be integral to how local authorities carry out work to fulfil their functions.

A legislative basis for tackling poverty and for consulting with those affected by poverty will allow for greater consistency across local authorities and give considerable confidence both to local authorities seeking to put in place consultative processes and structures, and to local community and voluntary organisations seeking to play a more proactive part in influencing local government policy and decisions. Detailed proposals are made in relation to poverty-proofing at local authority level:

- strengthening the commitments to consultation and participation;
- strengthening the right of access for the public to local authority meetings;
- strengthening transparency and accountability, particularly in relation to the operation of the Community Fund;
- fostering more active citizenship, in particular for those who are marginalised.

If adopted, the proposals outlined in the Agency submission will strengthen the role of local authorities in tackling poverty and give them for the first time specific statutory responsibilities in this area. The Agency believes that the future of local government lies in a complementary system of representative and participatory democracy. Undoubtedly representative democracy is a fundamental prerequisite to accountable planning and decision-making. However, providing for participation, particularly of excluded individuals and groups, can strengthen that accountability and enhance the quality of planning and decision making arrived at. Copies of the Agency submission are available on our website www.cpa.ie or from the office.

Clare Farrell is a Policy Officer at the Combat Poverty Agency .

Authorities in Tackling Poverty

A Councillor's Perspective on New Local Government Anti-Poverty Work

CLLR TOM WOOD

Terms such as 'anti-poverty', 'social inclusion', and 'social exclusion' are relatively new to most councillors, but the terms represent the experiences of citizens whom councillors often represent. The challenge for local authorities is to ensure that our responses in tackling poverty fit into the social context championed in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

CHANGING ROLE

The nature of the local authority's role in providing housing has changed. The job was perceived to be done in the past when the bricks and mortar were in place. There is an increased awareness among public representatives and officials that other needs must be met in the location and provision of housing. While it may be impossible to customize houses, there is a need to match applicants with housing estates. The value and respect accorded to a house can be enhanced by a good design. Site lay-out is important in allying safety concerns. Housing cannot be divorced from facilities – access to play areas for the young and access to childcare are the minimum facilities required on any estate. Security and a sense of belonging are essential for our elderly tenants. An estate can be better managed and sustained into the long term if it is done well in partnership with (prospective) tenants, residents' associations and other public and community bodies.

NEW WAYS OF OPERATING

Partnership, consultation, listening, encouraging participation are activities which require new ways of operating on behalf of citizens, not just for local authority officials but for councillors too.

The public representative often has a much greater knowledge of the personal conditions of the citizen. The citizen wants to get the job done. The local authority official has resource limitations. The perspectives of other agencies also need to be understood and noted. There may be tensions between individual citizens in relation to any proposal. Volunteers prepared to work on behalf of their housing estates take a big risk in dealing with public bodies and need full backing and support and recognition for their work.

The Combat Poverty Agency in collaboration with the Departments of Environment and Local Government and Social, Community and Family Affairs recently established a Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network. The value of a Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network is that these perspectives can be shared and lessons learned from the best and worst experience. Tipperary (South Riding) Co Council was among the first local authorities to seek membership. The councillors and local authority officials from all over the country present at the inaugural meeting of the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network held in Nenagh on January 24, 2001 were unanimous in their desire to learn from sharing experience and from the expertise of the Combat Poverty Agency and other groups targeting social inclusion.

DEVELOPMENTS IN CASHEL

Local authorities are responding to the new challenge. We need to do more, especially to reward our citizens who volunteer to engage in partnership. These volunteers are under considerable pressure from their peers and made feel

that 'they are wasting their time'. I am pleased to note that in my home town, Cashel, the Urban District Council has made two positive decisions that will enhance the quality of the lives of its tenants. The UDC has transferred a site to the Spafield Crescent Residents Association, which had already secured the agreement of other partners to help it develop a new resource centre in the estate. Facilities for young and old will not just cater for residents of the estate but for the people of the town in general.

The second positive decision (of Cashel UDC) was to allocate resources to a two year home improvement plan, based on a survey of all public rented houses in the town. This latter initiative should lessen the visible difference between 'resident purchased' and 'resident rented' houses in the same estate. Window and door replacements, insulation and the provision of central heating will greatly improve conditions.

A local anti-poverty strategy is needed in every county in Ireland. The 'Celtic Tiger' has certainly alleviated hardship in many cases but poverty is still visible even in towns such as Cashel. The new structures in local government in South Tipperary include a Housing and Social Strategic Policy Committee. There is no doubt in my mind that the work of this Committee will be strengthened by the County Council's participation in the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network.

Cllr. Tom Wood is Cathaoirleach, Tipperary (South Riding) Co. Council.

Towards Effective Involvement of Excluded Groups

JAMES MAGOWAN

This article reflects on the experience and conclusions of a Transnational project that set out to develop guidelines for involving excluded people and their organisations in anti-poverty and social inclusion policies. The project involved partners in Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, and Portugal. It was co-funded by the European Commission under the Programme for Preparatory Actions to Combat and Prevent Social Exclusion.

THE VISION

The vision for the project was articulated as follows at one of the seminars held during the project.

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

This vision will remain elusive until appropriate models for involvement are developed and implemented. It is clearly in the interests of policy makers, excluded people and organisations that represent them, to strive together to realise this vision. It would build shared understanding and ownership, and make policies more relevant and effective. It has relevance at all levels of policy making from local through national and EU. It offers an opportunity and a challenge to all stakeholders. The vision is therefore not a utopia, more of a pragmatic way forward.

THE REALITY

The reality is that, to varying degrees across the EU, we fall short of achieving effective involvement. Despite an evolving policy framework that places increasing emphasis on the eradication of poverty and the promotion of inclusion, it appears that a quantum leap is still required in relation to engaging excluded people in participatory approaches. In some cases, as in Ireland, there is a commitment but a need to embed it in practice; in others there is a need for both.

The project partners brought diverse experience to the table. The national contexts varied both in relation to policy environment and the social and political infrastructure. Whilst being valuable in forcing each of us to raise our sights above our limited respective national perspectives it presented the challenge in finding the common denominators - including a shared understanding of the problem and validity and relevance of solutions. In short legislation/national agreements are in place in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Netherlands that provides for consultation with relevant representative bodies, and working practices between the state and the voluntary and community sector are evolving. Portugal too has recently established a Social Network that seeks to promote involvement. In Finland there is a much less developed NGO sector and strong tradition of state control, albeit it in a decentralised manner.

The increasing commitment to consultation reflected in the national legislative frameworks has an upside and downside. It has formalised and professionalised poverty-proofing and equality mainstreaming procedures, but - as has been the case in Northern Ireland - created a tidal wave of consultations that

has the potential of engulfing representative organisations and further removing those actually experiencing poverty and exclusion from the process. The key issue at stake is the actual commitment to involvement and to the belief that this will lead to more relevant and effective policy. This is more than mere compliance to a tick-box exercise in consultation. Genuine attempts are being made to find new participatory processes and to improve actual involvement. In this regard the participation of the NAPS Unit from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, as a partner in the project was significant and valued by all.

It was in this context that the project partners set about developing Guidelines for Involvement that could help policy makers and excluded people and organisations that represent them, develop more effective working relationships.

THE GUIDELINES

There was a certain irony in the fact that the method of developing guidelines - whereby each project-partner undertook participatory exercises in their respective countries - could itself have benefited from the availability of such guidelines. This confirmed the value of the project and its end product, and revealed through practice, the wide range of institutional/political, cultural, physical, technical, and economic barriers that prevent meaningful involvement.

Following considerable debate on how to overcome these barriers, and more importantly, how to present solutions in a form that is relevant and applicable across the diverse contexts, it was decided to present the guidelines in the form of a set of over-arching principles (see box), and accompanying menu for action.



CORE PRINCIPLES

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

Our objective was to provide a practical tool, not rhetoric. Considerable effort was put into developing a product that was widely applicable yet not the lowest common denominator. The resulting menu for action provides a flexible framework that sets out what issues should be addressed and how. It revolves around the three inter-related factors of purpose, process and practical implications; is intended to be adaptable to specific circumstances and to be used

by those responsible for anti-poverty strategies and excluded people and organisations representing them.

A WORTHWHILE VENTURE?

There has been significant learning from the project. It will only have been worthwhile if we each in our own situations seek to have the guidelines adopted and used in practice, not only within the partner countries but more

widely across the EU. The development of specific methods and techniques is a next step and is already being addressed by others.

However there remains a challenge to policy makers and representative organisations to commit to the process of meaningful involvement. There now exists a favourable environment in which to establish practice to realise the vision. Complementary actions at EU level designed to add value to those within Member States themselves can act to demonstrate good practice. For example, the Commission - recognising 'the need for ensuring an active participation of all stakeholders, especially those excluded or exposed to social exclusion as well as the organisations working for their interests' - has proposed within its 2001-2005 action programme to support broad-based policy dialogue and debate at European level on social exclusion. This includes core-funding relevant key European networks involved in combating poverty and social exclusion and an annual EU Round Table Conference on Social Exclusion.

Copies of the Guidelines are available on request from the Combat Poverty Agency.

James McGowan is Research and Policy Officer with Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust.

Reviewing progress on Traveller accommodation

DAVY JOYCE

After almost twenty years of campaigning by the Traveller sector for improvements in Traveller accommodation, the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community was published in 1995. This report set out a framework from which a Traveller accommodation strategy could be advanced. Arising from this the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 was introduced. This is the first time that a specific piece of legislation was introduced in relation to Traveller accommodation. This legislation provided for the establishment of Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACC) in each local authority area to draw up and implement Traveller Accommodation Programmes. It was envisaged that these programmes would provide for the accommodation needs of Travellers over a five-year period. Traveller organisations responded to this challenge through seeking representation on these committees and bringing a collective Traveller agenda to the meetings in an effort to shape the development and content of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes.

LOCAL TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES (LTACC)

The majority of the LTACCs were set up within the timeframe set out by the Department of the Environment and Local Government. The LTACCs comprises Traveller/Traveller organisation representatives, council officials and elected representatives. The remit of the committees is to:

- Advise in relation to the preparation and implementation of any accommodation programme for the functional area of the appointing authority concerned;
- Advise on the management of accommodation for Travellers;
- Provide a liaison between Travellers and officials of the appointing authority concerned.

Much of the initial work of the committees was to try and reach working relationships based on anti-racist principles and respect for Traveller culture. Addressing these issues and the power imbalance that exists between the Traveller representatives and the council officials and elected members is one of the

main challenges facing the LTACC. It would have been a definite advantage if there were a requirement on the local authorities to adopt terms of reference and a code of conduct for the operation of the committees from the outset. Presently, the Department of the Environment and Local Government will be issuing a 'Recommended Code of Practice' for the operation of the LTACCs. It will be crucial that the LTACCs adopt and implement this code to improve the effectiveness of how they operate.

Many Traveller organisations agree that having a formalised structure to debate accommodation issues with the local authority is useful. On the other hand, a significant number of Traveller representatives have identified that their input on the LTACC is not reflected in the Traveller Accommodation Programmes. This has serious implications for the quality of the programmes and the usefulness of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes in meeting the accommodation requirements of Travellers.

TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMMES

The Traveller Accommodation Programme should contain the following elements:

- an assessment of the current situation with regard to Traveller Accommodation and the adoption of solutions to meet these needs;
- a number of accommodation types such as permanent halting sites, group housing, and transient sites;
- targets set on an annual basis for the provision of the necessary accommodation;
- provision for review of the programme;
- strategies for the management of Traveller accommodation.

The recognition of the range of accommodation types which need to be provided, in particular in regard to transient halting sites, gives important legal recognition to the nomadic identity of Travellers. The development and content of the Local Traveller Accommodation Programmes are quite diverse across the country. Many do not contain all of the elements as mentioned above. In many of the programmes there are no strategies for implementation identified or annual targets

set. Broad generalised statements that are not backed up with specific commitments can be found in a number of programmes.

There is a provision for review of the programmes over the next period. Traveller groups will be using this to seek amendments to the programmes that are not useful and ensuring that areas of weakness within the programmes are addressed. In the meantime it is important that where concrete commitments are contained in the programmes that these are implemented without further delay.

RESOURCING TRAVELLER PARTICIPATION

The amount of effort and resources required of Traveller groups to respond to these developments has been significant. Traveller organisations have been arguing for a long time for the inclusion of a Traveller perspective in the provision of accommodation. However, the sudden requirement on local authorities to include Travellers has put a certain level of strain on the capacity of the Traveller organisations to effectively ensure that the views of Traveller are reflected in some 37 plans that have been drawn up around the country. This resource requirement needs to be addressed.

CONCLUSION

The majority of the programmes were adopted by the deadline as set down. However, a year on and little progress has been made on the implementation of the programmes. The reality is that the numbers on the roadside have increased from 1,112 families in 1995 to 1,207 families in 1999, an increase of 95 families. Unless there is significant progress made in the coming year then there are serious doubts as to the ability of the local authority to deliver the Traveller Accommodation Programmes. The Minister may need to use the powers conferred on him under the Act to ensure progress is made. Failure to see real progress in the coming two years should result in the option to establish the introduction of a National Traveller Accommodation Agency. This is a real test of the ability of local government to deliver.

Davy Joyce is Accommodation Officer with the Irish Traveller Movement.

Developing Health Targets for National Anti-Poverty Strategy

DR. JIM KIEL Y

There is strong and consistent evidence of a relationship between health and socio-economic status, with a gradient in health favouring those who are higher up the socio-economic scale. Poorer people experience poorer health. Inequalities in health status between socio-economic groups have been demonstrated and are persisting in Ireland. Therefore it is crucial that health issues are addressed within the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. While health issues were outlined in the NAPS in 1997, no health targets were set.

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness commits the Department of Health and Children to draw up health targets for the next stage of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and a NAPS monitoring and

implementation framework for the health sector. These are very welcome developments in public policy development. The Working Group on NAPS and Health is to put recommendations on both these commitments to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion.

The Working Group is made up of representatives of the social partners (i.e. community and voluntary Pillar, trade unions, business and farming Pillar), the health boards, the Department of Health and Children, and other relevant government departments, Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) and the Institute of Public Health (IPH). The Institute of Public Health in Ireland has been commissioned to support and facilitate the work of the Working Group, the consultation process and to provide technical expertise. The Terms of Reference for the Working

Group on NAPS and Health are as follows:

- outlining the context of the relationship between poverty, social exclusion and health and the rationale for setting health targets that will lead to a reduction in poverty and health inequalities;
- consultation and participation of the relevant sectors in the target setting process;
- recommending short, medium and long term targets that are measurable and that can be incorporated into the next set of NAPS targets;
- identifying strategies and



actions/measures that contribute to the achievement of the targets;

- identifying indicators that can be used to measure the progress and monitor the performance towards meeting the targets and recommending mechanisms for periodic review of the targets.

Particular attention will be paid to child poverty, women's poverty and older people.

The Working Group on NAPS and Health is focusing on three main areas described below:

(I) EQUITY OF ACCESS TO SERVICES

Equity of access to services encompasses a range of issues, e.g. geographical access, barriers to access, quality of service, rural/urban issues, experiences of particular populations e.g. Travellers, ethnic minorities, the elderly etc. and outcomes. It can range from access to primary care and preventative services to hospital beds and long term care. Equity of service access for people who are poor or socially excluded is an important issue. As outlined in 'Shaping a Healthier Future' and in the White Paper on Private Health Insurance, 1999, it is a matter of priority that all services are provided equitably on the basis of need. This is in line with the strategy of introducing poverty proofing into the health service. It will have relevance to all service providers, across preventive, primary, secondary and long-term care. It also gives scope for specific targets to be drawn up by the Department of Health and Children and for a NAPS implementation and monitoring framework for the health sector to be developed.

(II) IMPACT OF PUBLIC POLICY ON HEALTH

As many of the social determinants of health lie outside of the health sector, any target setting exercise to address the poverty/health interface needs to include reference to the impact of these wider determinants on health and specifically on inequalities in health. In view of the strong relationship between poverty, social exclusion and health, it may be important to explore the potential for assessing policies not only for their impact on poverty, as the current poverty proofing strategies require, but also on health. Research shows that disparity in income impacts on health across the socio-economic gradient, therefore the issue of

equity of health status and what influences this will need to be considered. The subgroup on this issue will deliberate how this might be done and what could be a reasonable target in relation to this. It may involve liaising with the other Working Groups setting targets, (e.g. the Working groups on Housing/Accommodation, Educational Disadvantage, Urban and Rural poverty), considering a health dimension to poverty proofing and the possible role of Health Impact Assessment in public policy development. Health Impact Assessment is a way of assessing the impact of significant policies on health and can be used as a mechanism of ensuring the policies lead to a reduction of inequalities in health.

(III) INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

In order to set targets, one needs to clarify and explore the complex relationship between poverty, social exclusion and health; the pathways that exist between them; how these can be addressed; and what can be used as indicators to measure the impact of actions to reduce poverty and inequalities in health. Due to the current dearth of data and information, there is limited knowledge against which targets can be set. Therefore, it will be important to identify the gaps in current knowledge and analysis so that more specific and evidence-based targets can be created in the future.

CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR WORKING GROUP ON NAPS AND HEALTH

Many Government departments are looking for information from the public in relation to setting targets for the next stage of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). There are a variety of mechanisms being put in place by the Working Group on NAPS and Health to gain the views of the public and people who work in areas relevant to this process. These different ways are:

- Making a public call for submissions;
- Hosting regional seminars with health service providers, statutory and non-statutory;
- Gathering information through the networks and constituent organisations of the Community and Voluntary Pillar;
- Gathering information through the

City and County Development Boards.

- Providing resources for direct consultation with excluded people to advocacy groups and organisations who represent and work with excluded people;
- Hosting a national conference in May 2001;
- Carrying out a review and analysis of existing sources of information obtained through recent consultations, in research documents, reports and strategies.

The Department of Health and Children has prioritised the issue of inequalities in health and sees it as one of the greatest challenges facing both government and society. I am committed to putting this issue centre stage of strategic planning for government. This Department is also in the process of developing a new Health Strategy. The work carried out by the Working Group on NAPS and Health will feed directly into this new Health Strategy.

If the cycle of inequality is to be broken, it is vital that there is partnership between government and the statutory and voluntary sectors, inter-sectoral collaboration and close co-operation between government departments. In order to achieve a reduction in inequalities in health, it is essential that this issue is central to the next stage of the NAPS and the new Health Strategy.

I look forward on hearing your views on how best we can achieve a reduction in inequalities in health.

Dr Jim Kiely is the Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health and Children and Chair of the Working Group on NAPS and Health.

Further information on the call for submissions is available at

Ph: 01 6785935

Fax: 01 6616762.

E mail: [napsandhealth@health.irlgov .ie](mailto:napsandhealth@health.irlgov.ie) or Webpage: www.doh.ie/naps.

Lo-call comment line: 1890 460 960.

European Social Policy Gathers Pace

New national action plans against poverty roll out on 1st July Challenge to improve the NAPS in Ireland

BRIAN HARVEY

Only two years into her term as European social affairs commissioner, Anna Diamantopoulou can point to progress in several significant areas. 2000 saw the announcement of the new programme against poverty, the approval of the 3-strand package of measures against discrimination, the introduction of the new European social policy agenda, and the beginning of the system of open policy coordination (see Poverty Today, #49). At the Nice heads of government summit last December, European leaders gave the green light to further advances in European social policy under the Swedish presidency with its two summits in Stockholm (March) and Gothenburg (June).

NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

All the member state are now invited to prepare National Action Plans against social exclusion, to come into effect on 1st July 2001 and to run until 30th June 2003. This presents a terminological problem for Ireland, since we already have the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). The European Commission has, thankfully, given a slightly different name to the national action plans against social exclusion and these are called NAPSIncl (National Action Plans for Inclusion).

Each NAPSIncl must be submitted to the Commission for approval by 1st June for approval by the Social Affairs Council on 11th June and presumably mention in the conclusion of the Gothenburg summit soon thereafter. What will be in these plans?

Each country's NAPSIncl must include, in not more than 40 pages, the following:

- Description of the national poverty situation
- List of concrete objectives and targets
- Policies, including details of:
 - how to involve the different participants in the plans
 - Groups and areas targeted

- How the plans will promote equality between men and women
- Measures to promote employment
- Innovative elements
- Outcome indicators and monitoring mechanisms
- How resources are committed to achieving these objectives
- Examples of good practice which could usefully be applied in other member states, especially in the area of new technologies.
- How the plan will be coordinated.

Ireland's position in Europe is unusual insofar this country already has a national strategy against poverty. Few other European countries have anything like it. The themes which Europe has laid down for NAPSIncl - employment, income adequacy, health and education - are broadly similar to that of the Irish NAPS. So does this mean Ireland has little to do? Not so.

NEW ACTIONS REQUIRED

One of the most significant requirements on the member states is that they must make a distinction between on-going actions and new actions. This means that Ireland cannot simply rehash the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and send it to Europe as Ireland's NAPSIncl. Instead, the NAPSIncl must include genuinely new elements, thus providing a golden opportunity for updating, enhancing, broadening, deepening and improving the Irish commitment to action against poverty. It could also energize the current review of the NAPS in Ireland, which is badly behind schedule.

Each country is expected to organize consultation with those interested in the programme, the actors as they are called. Each NAPSIncl must tell the Commission how it involves the actors and how they will be involved in monitoring and implementing the plan. Likewise, this gives the Irish authorities an opportunity to organize a thorough, comprehensive and meaningful programme of consultation.

CO-ORDINATING BODY

Overall, the European NAPSIncl is coordinated by the European Social Policy Committee (ESPC), whose home is the Commission's Directorate General for Employment (DG EMPL). The ESPC is a new body which developed from informal meetings of European governmental officials concerned with poverty and social policy and which later evolved into what was called the High Level Committee on Social Protection. It is not well publicized and so far does not have its own website. The two Irish members are Tom Mulherin and Gerry Mangan of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and they will work with two colleagues from each of the other member states and two Commission representatives, 32 people in all. The ESPC first met in September 2000 and its role is to monitor social protection policies in the member states, oversee the NAPSIncl and develop indicators to measure poverty. The ESPC is required to prepare an annual report for the Council and Commission.

ACTIONS

Turning to the question of indicators, the Commission has issued a Communication in advance of the Stockholm summit arguing that Europe must agree new indicators for social exclusion before the end of the year. Comparable European-Union wide data on poverty and social exclusion are too old, it says, with most indicators going back to 1996. The aims of the first strand of the new programme against poverty will be an improvement in statistics and information. Thus by the end of this year, 2001, National Action Plans for Social Inclusion should be well under way in each member state, the new programme against poverty will be launched and the basis will be laid for fresh information on poverty across Europe - quite a turnaround to the situation five years ago.

Brian Harvey is an independent research consultant

Noticeboard

EQUALITY STUDIES

Applications are invited for the Masters Degree in Equality Studies & Higher Diploma in Equality Studies.

The only programme of its kind in Ireland, Equality Studies provides students with a unique and challenging opportunity to examine a wide range of equality, human rights and social justice issues. Courses are taught by staff from the disciplines of sociology, economics, law, education, politics, social policy, development and women's studies. The courses may be taken on a 1 year full-time or 2 year part-time (evening) basis. The four major themes are: Social Class Structures and Equality; Gender Inequalities; Global North/South Inequalities and Development; Minorities and Discrimination (including racism, ageism, disability, language and sexualities).

The Equality Studies Centre also welcomes applications from those interested in undertaking a Ph.D. Degree by research. Details from: The Secretary, Equality Studies Centre, Library Building, University College Dublin, Belfield, Dublin 4. Telephone: (01) 716 7104/716 7681. Fax: (01) 706 1107. Email: patricia.gantly@ucd.ie. WWW: <http://www.ucd.ie/~esc/>
Application deadline: Friday, May 4th 2001. Late applications may be considered, subject to the availability of places.

COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY DIARY DATES

6th April – Agency Grants Seminar

A one day seminar will be held in the Aisling Hotel, Dublin to promote the Agency's grants scheme, Working Against Poverty. The scheme funds community and voluntary groups to influence public policy for the benefit of people experiencing poverty through research, public awareness or evaluation work. The seminar is open to any community and voluntary organisation interested in undertaking this work. Speakers from previously funded projects will highlight their work and advice and support will be available on what type of work the scheme can fund and on ways to influence policy. For further information contact Catherine on 01 602 6626 or gaulc@cpa.ie

3rd May – Community Research Seminar

The Agency is hosting a Community Research Seminar on May 3rd in the Aisling Hotel, Dublin on community profiling research. The seminar is aimed at those conducting research in and on the voluntary and community sector. Groups are invited to make presentations on innovative examples of community profiling. Further details from Tracey O'Brien (obrient@cpa.ie) / Leona Walker (walker@cpa.ie) on 01-6706746.

28th May – Poverty and Inequality Conference

The Agency is hosting a one day conference on Poverty and Inequality in Jury's Hotel, Ballsbridge. The conference has three key objectives:

- to promote awareness and debate on the links between poverty and inequality;
- to analyse social spending as an anti-poverty strategy in the key policy areas of education, employment, health, housing, social welfare and taxation;
- to influence policy options for achieving a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in Irish society.

For booking form, leave your contact details on Tel. 01 602 6625 or at gaulc@cpa.ie or byrnev@cpa.ie

1 June – Grants closing date

The closing date for applications to the Agency's grants scheme

Working Against Poverty is 1st June. For application forms and information brochures please contact 01 602 6625 leaving your contact details or visit our website to download the relevant documentation at www.cpa.ie

IRISH SOCIAL POLICY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE 2001

The 2001 Annual Conference of the Irish Social Policy Association is a joint event with the Social Policy Association (UK). It will take place in Queen's University, Belfast and Trinity College, Dublin.

Development, Regeneration and Social Policy, Trinity College, Dublin: July 26th and 27th.

Contributions for this conference are invited on the following sub-themes: economic development and social policy; political development and social policy; the role of partnerships (for example, local, national, international, public-private) in social development; urban or rural regeneration (including issues such as taxation incentives, marginalisation and community participation). Suggestions for other relevant sub-themes will be considered. Preference will be given to papers which examine Ireland, especially those which adopt a comparative approach. Keynote speakers: David Donnison (University of Glasgow), Seamus Ó Cinnéide (NUI, Maynooth).

Reconstituting Social Policy: Global, National, Local: Queens University, Belfast: July 24th to 26th.

Contributions for this conference are invited on the impact or implications for social policy of equality and human rights; political violence; new constitutions and societies in transition; supra and international governmental and non-governmental organisations; devolution; federalism; criminal justice. There will also be a teaching and learning stream and an open stream. Keynote speaker: Guy Standing (ILO), Mary Daly (QUB).

Further details from www.qub.ac.uk/spacon or <http://www.ispa.ie> or Martina Reidy, ISPA Tel. 01 7068198 or martina.dreidy@ucd.ie or Siobhan Bogues, Queen's University, Tel. 0044 28 90209000 or spaconf@uqb.ac.uk

NEW AGENCY PAPERS/PUBLICATIONS

Three recent documents produced by or for the Agency are listed below. The first two are available to download from our website www.cpa.ie

Poverty Briefing on Child Poverty in Ireland: a four page free publication that summarises results from a research report Child Poverty in Ireland by Brian Nolan of the ESRI and published by Oak Tree Press in association with the Combat Poverty Agency - ring publications 01 602 6644; fax 01 670 6760; e-mail byrnev@cpa.ie or download from www.cpa.ie

Local Government Bill: submission from the Agency to the Local Government Bill currently being discussed in the Oireachtas - ring publications 01 602 6644; fax 01 670 6760; e-mail byrnev@cpa.ie, or download from www.cpa.ie

The Relationship between Poverty and Inequality: Background paper prepared for the Agency by the Equality Studies Centre UCD - ring publications 01 602 6644; fax 01 670 6760; e-mail byrnev@cpa.ie



Books & Reports

JOE LARRAGY

The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, The Parekh Report, Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, The Runnymede Trust, London, 2000, pp.417, Stg£10.99, ISBN 1 86197 227-X.

This is a major report addressing issues that are fundamental to how multi-ethnic Britain will evolve in the future - whether increasingly narrow and inward looking or as a community of citizens and communities. It calls for a rethinking of the British identity, not just as a political-territorial entity but as an imagined community, in the light of post-war migration, devolution, globalisation, decline of empire, moral and cultural pluralism and integration with Europe. It includes the Irish in Britain as a separate ethnic group, and addresses issues and policy implications in a thorough and systematic way. While much is directly related to Britain, there is a great deal of relevance to Ireland, where identities are also in transition.

Towards an Integrated Approach to Human Rights Education, Edited by K. O'Shea, B. Gill & A. Clifford, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit / Trócaire, Dublin, 2000, pp.79, no price quoted, ISBN 0 94 6791 18X.

This joint publication brings together keynote papers and responses to a series of seminars on how to develop human rights in the formal education curriculum at second level. The "Good Friday" Agreement and establishment of human rights commissions north and south of the border give added impetus to this exercise. Themes include imagination, democratisation of learning and the promotion of equality and tolerance. The aim of the publication is to bring these reflections to a wider audience and to reach a consensus on how to develop the curriculum.

The Politics of Children's Rights, Frank Martin, Undercurrents Series, Cork University Press, Cork, 2000, pp.97, no price quoted, ISBN 1 85915 272 0.

This concise, informative and readable text analyses the recent evolution of Irish children's rights. It covers the evolving legal and policy-making environment from an international perspective, examines the role of NGOs in lobbying for change in Ireland and traces the evolution of Irish child law since 1980, highlighting the interventionist role of the courts. In light of the Constitutional Review Group, the 1997 Children Act and recommendations from the Law Reform Commission, it assesses how far Ireland has progressed.

Men on the Move, A Study of Barriers to Male Participation in Education and Training Initiatives, Toni Owens, Aontas, Dublin, 2000, pp.62, no price quoted, ISBN 0 906826 11 X.

This research explores why groups of marginalised men are more difficult to reach with training initiatives than marginalised women are. Through focus groups of men from five training environments it explores previous experiences of alienation from education and training provision, and seeks insights into their peers' continuing alienation. The key finding is that construction of masculinity early in life - often in macho terms - may be the first barrier to admitting the need for help, or to joining a supportive group. This provides the starting point for new approaches.

Ask Not for Whom the Tiger Roars, Fintan Tallon, Oak Tree Press, Dublin, 2000, pp.147, ISBN 1 86076 204 2.

Fintan Tallon's critique of the Celtic Tiger economy focuses on loss of community in rural areas and working class suburbs. He identifies these as the downsides of bureaucratic, centralised development strategies based on foreign investment. Infused with communitarian and religious idealism, his views are nevertheless grounded in practical experience in promoting community enterprise abroad and in Ireland. His critique of the local area partnerships contrasts with previous accounts, such as Charles Sabel's.

Government as Partners, The Role of Central Government in Developing New Social Partnership, The Findings from Seven European Countries, C. Gribben, K. Pinnington, A. Wilson, The Copenhagen Centre, Denmark, pp.115, no price quoted, ISBN 87-988161-2-8

This comparative study presents the perceptions of central government actors in seven states on "new social partnerships", that is partnerships addressing social exclusion and involving actors from the statutory, private, voluntary and community sectors. Included are France, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Spain and the UK. As well as national case studies, the report offers a comparative synthesis revealing variation in definition of the scope and meaning of partnership, in the impact of globalisation and in prospects for further partnership in national contexts. It also identifies some underlying common themes.

Community Economic Development - Rhetoric or Reality? Edited by Alan Twelvetrees, Community Development Foundation Publications, Great Britain, 1998, pp.343, no price quoted, ISBN 1 901974 00 6.

Community economic development in Britain has become an important field of research, policy and practice since the 1980s. This book draws on the experience of projects in the UK and in the US. There are 50 chapters in all, dealing with a wide range of cases, issues and problems. The lessons drawn appear to be geared not only for the UK but also for transfer to Eastern Europe and Russia, as indicated by the last parts.

In Pursuit of Excellence, Measuring Quality in the Voluntary Sector, Quality Standards Task Group, QSTG & NCVO Publications, London, 2000, pp.83, STG£10, ISBN 0 7199 1652 7.

Amateurism is one of the criticisms often levelled at voluntary organisations and new pressures for quality assurance are emerging to keep quality issues on the agenda. This report examines actual quality systems in use and sets out an agenda for addressing a range of practical issues. It cautions against the adoption of inappropriate quality systems. This report would be of relevance to organisations seeking to demystify the concept of quality control and work out an authentic path to excellence.

Achieving Better Community Development, ABCD Handbook, A framework for evaluating community development, A. Barr & Stuart Hashagen, Community Development Foundation Publications, Great Britain, 2000, pp.91, no price quoted, ISBN 1 901974 20 0.

This handbook aims to provide a framework for understanding, planning, evaluating and learning from community development. It emphasises participation by all stakeholders in the process and seeks to build evaluation and learning into planning. It sets out several distinct dimensions of community development and a step by step procedure for defining objectives and structuring evaluation around the concepts of inputs, process, outputs and outcomes.

Copies of the above titles are available for reference only in the Combat Poverty Agency's Library. Contact library@cpa.ie or tel: 01 6706746. To purchase any of the above, please contact the publisher as listed or order through your bookshop.

Economic and Social Rights for Northern Ireland

LES ALLAMBY

One important strand in the Belfast Agreement is the protection of human rights. As part of that protection the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission is charged with developing a Bill of Rights. The Bill is designed to provide additional rights to those contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and must reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland. This exercise represents a real opportunity to assist in the fight against poverty through the creation of economic and social rights.

In October 2000 the Human Rights Act was introduced in Northern Ireland, providing a form of incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic legislation. The Convention protects fundamental rights and freedoms including the right to a fair trial, freedom of speech and freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment. By and large, the Convention protects civil and political rights rather than economic and social rights. In practice, creative attempts have been made to enforce economic and social rights within the confines of the Convention. The Law Centre (NI) presently has cases at the European Court in Strasbourg arguing that the failure to provide widowers with a social security benefit equivalent to that of widows, is contrary to the right to family life (Article 8).

CONSULTATION AND EDUCATION

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has taken a multi-faceted approach in consulting on what should be in the Bill of Rights. A programme of education and training has been devised for people working in local communities. Advertisements, posters, leaflets and information on the Commission's website have been used. Eight working groups have been set up to advise the Commission on what should be contained in the draft Bill that will be published in April 2001. The creation of an economic and social rights working group as one of the eight groups signalled the importance the Commission attaches to those rights.

IDENTIFYING RIGHTS

What approach did the economic and social rights working group take to its task? First, the group recognised the limitations of promoting economic and social rights solely through courts of law. Legal cases, important though they are, tend to sideline those at the sharp end of poverty and social exclusion. The working group sought to underpin their advice by arguing that economic and social rights are best advanced through a pro-active and systematic programme of government action. A number of specific rights were identified as needing particular attention in the Bill. These rights were:

- the right to health;
- the right to an adequate standard of living;
- the right to housing;
- the right to work;
- the right to a healthy and sustainable environment.

Each right contains a legal drafting which is widely drawn. The right to health extends to the delivery of health and social services and the right of individuals and communities to be consulted about decisions affecting physical and mental health. A right to an adequate standard of living encompasses food, clothing, fuel and social security and covers social and civic care to ensure that people can lead their lives in dignity. This approach, if followed, would allow issues such as support for carers and provision of decent quality residential care to be part of a Bill of Rights. The right to work has incorporated the right to just and favourable conditions and the need for government to support and encourage the continuous development of skills, knowledge and understanding. The drafting also recognises the contribution made to economic and social life by those outside of traditional work, for example those who choose to be volunteers, bring up children or care for others.

All of the legal draftings proposed for economic and social rights are underwritten with an interpretative clause affirming that poverty and social exclusion represent a fundamental denial of human

dignity; that government has to make a major commitment to tackle the causes of economic and social deprivation; that rights should be protected equally and without discrimination and the recognition that government needs to allocate resources in a proportionate manner.

The advice offered by the working group is designed to place rights in a framework that recognises the responsibility of government and its institutions but, also, that other economic and social organisations and local communities have a pro-active role to play. The idea in the long term is to develop a culture where everyone recognises that certain rights are essential to both basic human dignity and the opportunity to participate fully in society.

Whether this type of approach will be adopted by the Human Rights Commission in its draft Bill of Rights remains to be seen. Moreover, whether such an approach would survive scrutiny in Westminster is another moot point. Nonetheless, a real debate will be generated.

ALL-ISLAND IMPLICATIONS

All of this also has resonance in the Republic. The Belfast Agreement requires the Human Rights Commissions, North and South to set up a joint committee to consider human rights issues throughout Ireland. The joint committee is expected to examine the possibility of establishing a charter for the protection of fundamental rights for everyone living in the island. The Northern debate on economic and social rights as part of a Bill of Rights, may be the forerunner of a much wider discussion across the whole island.

Les Allamby is the Director of Law Centre (NI) and chaired the economic and social rights working group. Their report is available from the Human Rights Commission, Temple Court, 39 North Street, Belfast, BT1 1NA, Telephone: (028) 9024 3987.

[Anti-Poverty Work in Action]

Deirdre Piggot Information Officer providing an outreach service in Athlone



[Social policy work is becoming very important and information has a role in shaping and influencing policy. However, engaging with this process requires the investment of resources if it is to be effective.]

(Teresa McCourt, Development Manager)

PILOTING A SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR LONE PARENTS 'NEW OPPORTUNITIES'

Evaluation Grant, £6,000 provided

Building links and jointly developing services with other community and statutory agencies is a key strategy. The Citizens Information Service liaises regularly with agencies such as the health board to discuss social policy issues of common concern and identify gaps in services. It hopes in the future to expand the scope of this liaison to include the joint development of information services.

The information service provides a link between the policy-making process, the individual citizen and local groups through monitoring and documenting the experiences of people in accessing social services. When a problem is identified locally, the first step is to make representations with the agency at local level. If the problem is not resolved, the entire issue is documented and referred to Comhairle who make recommendations to policy makers and service providers about changes that should be made.

Westmeath Citizens Information Service actively seeks links with other voluntary or community agencies and often will make presentations on its work and services. With other citizens information services in the region, it is currently making a joint application for funding under the CAIT project to set up computerised information services in outreach areas with access to the Comhairle database.

The CIS is part of Westmeath Community and Voluntary Forum and has links to Westmeath Community Development Board. It is also a member of the Strategic Policy Committee of Westmeath County Council, where it participates in the development of social policy and services in the county. It believes that this will be such an important arena for influencing policy that a social policy officer to progress work in the region would be an asset.

(Westmeath Citizens Information Centre can be contacted at 0902-78851)

The Blanchardstown Lone Parents Steering Group was set up in November 1997 following an open meeting to discuss the needs of lone parents in Blanchardstown. This area of north-west Dublin has a very young population, high levels of single-parent families and pockets of severe poverty and economic disadvantage. The steering group comprises representatives of the Blanchardstown Youth Service, Barnardos, the Local Employment Service, Blanchardstown Area Partnership and lone parents.

The steering group started out by commissioning research into the needs of lone parents. The research report recommended that a pre-training course for lone parents be established as a priority. It also recommended that such a course be provided as an inter-agency project. FÁS and CDVEC responded enthusiastically to the proposal developed by the steering group and the Lone Parents New Opportunities pilot course started in November 1999 with 12 participants. The programme was run and co-ordinated by the VEC in partnership with FÁS and Blanchardstown Lone Parents Steering Group. Additional funding was obtained from Blanchardstown Area Partnership and DSCFA.

The aim of the course was to provide a variety of training/education opportunities for the most excluded lone parents to help them progress to further education, training or employment. It was structured around students' needs, and childcare and transport were provided to help parents participate. The research report had identified lack of affordable childcare as a major barrier to lone parents moving into training or employment.

Participants were paid FÁS training allowances and certain modules were accredited by the National Council for Vocational Awards and FÁS. It was the first such course to be run in Ireland.

[Anti-Poverty Work in Action]

[We feel that the group played an important role in helping agencies work together. This enabled new innovative responses to be put in place which met the needs of lone parents in our area.]

Combat Poverty Agency provided funding to evaluate the course from three criteria; the quality of learning participants had gained, the success of the course as a pilot programme, and the effectiveness of the inter-agency approach. From all three viewpoints, the evaluation was extremely positive.

A second course was organised in autumn 2000 but this time as a mainstream CDVEC/FÁS course. On this occasion, the Lone Parents Steering Group played an advisory role.

Having acted as a catalyst for the agencies to work together in providing the course, the Lone Parents Steering Group now plans to organise a seminar in late spring based on the evaluation of the first course. It will be targeted at state agencies such as FÁS, VECs, partnership companies and national groups with an interest in education and lone parenting. The aim of the seminar will be to outline the purpose of the course, the course outcomes, and how the course could be established elsewhere. The seminar will use workshops to enable everybody to participate and to maximise learning. Blanchardstown Lone Parents Steering Group will offer its experience and advice in helping to adapt the course to the needs of different areas.

In funding the evaluation, Combat Poverty Agency had requested that contacts be made with One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN) with a view to creating links between the Lone Parents Steering Group and similar groups throughout the country, and there is potential for promoting the course through these links.

As a result of the course, FÁS and Blanchardstown Area Partnership funded the appointment of a full-time lone parents support worker, managed by the Lone Parents Steering Group, with a brief to develop locally-based support groups for lone parents in six areas of Greater Blanchardstown.

Susan Bookle, Community Worker, Blanchardstown Area Partnership.

TRAVELLERS WORKING TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES

Research Grant, £6,000 provided

The Traveller Visibility Group in Cork city was set up formally by three Traveller women in 1993. They believed the past 'charity-based' approach to working with Travellers had failed to meet Travellers' needs, and that Travellers should take ownership of their situation and take part in finding the solutions.

From the beginning the group had a clear view that Travellers needed to take collective action to change their situation. Funding was secured to employ a researcher to identify the unmet needs of Travellers – the first time Travellers had commissioned such research for themselves. The publication of the research report, Making Travellers Visible, got a very good response from the Traveller community in Cork and gave a mandate for setting up a community development organisation.

The organisation has been involved with influencing official and statutory groups from the beginning. It found that their services often failed to meet the Traveller community's needs, or created dilemmas for them in seeking to improve their conditions. For example, the only social worker service available in practice for Cork city Travellers was provided through the local authority's housing service - yet accommodation could be a source of disagreement with the local authority.

Other dilemmas surfaced when the group took part in the consultative committee set up by the local authority to develop a five-year Traveller accommodation policy, in keeping with the recommendations of the 1995 Task Force on the Travelling Community. Travellers made up four of a 16-member committee and, while seeking to improve Traveller accommodation, were faced with a policy of evicting Travellers from non-designated sites by the same committee. That left the group torn between working to improve the community's accommodation and being identified within the community with a policy of evictions.

In each health board region, a Traveller health unit has been set up. The experience of Travellers on these units is very different from the direct experience of working with elected councillors and local authority officials. Much work has been done but the challenge remains to develop very clear policies on Traveller health.

The group works to give statutory agencies a human face for its members. Open meetings are held on topics such as equality legislation, where it tries to show how equality legislation could benefit Travellers. As a result, many cases are being taken under the equality legislation and the group successfully approached the Equality Authority to make its expertise readily available to these Travellers.

[A lot of policy development takes places at national level but to see that trickle down to local level is a challenge that Traveller organisations are faced with.]

(Chrissie O'Sullivan, co-ordinator)

To help Traveller children carry on successfully to third-level education, the group approached University College Cork and UCC is now supporting extra tuition for selected students to bring them on to the point where they could enter third level. The university is also sponsoring second-level schools to buy Traveller materials for use in school classrooms.

[Anti-Poverty Work in Action]

Pressing for changes in official policy and attitudes has been a major concern for the group. Combat Poverty Agency provided funding for a study on the extent of Travellers' impact on the decisions and policies of statutory bodies in Cork.

In the experience of the group, the effectiveness and responsiveness of a statutory body to Traveller concerns often depended on the attitude taken by individuals within that agency because a clear, consistent, organisational policy towards Travellers' needs did not exist. As well, agencies were often happy to work with some Travellers, for example, on literacy projects, but were unwilling to get involved with the Traveller Visibility Group which had very strong leanings to political analysis and empowerment of Travellers.

To date, the Traveller Visibility Group has not been invited to take part in consultations on local government reform as a way of creating more responsive official structures and policies towards Travellers. It believes it should have that right. It also wants regional policy development workers to work specifically on Traveller issues in order to help change the focus and raise awareness in the statutory and voluntary sector towards Travellers issues.

(Traveller Visibility Group Cork can be contacted at 021-4503786)

RACISM THROUGH BLACK AFRICAN EYES

Public Awareness Grant, £6,000 awarded

The Irish branch of the Pan-African Organisation was set up in 1997 to try to protect the rights of black African minorities in Ireland, to improve their living conditions and to try to eradicate prejudice and discrimination against them. It is part of a wider, European-wide movement. The Irish branch was registered as a company limited by guarantee and a recognised charity in 1998.

The organisation has consistently adopted the approach of seeking dialogue with government bodies and other agencies as a means of improving the lot of the black African community. It enjoys good relations with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

It also provides services directly to asylum-seekers. It plans shortly to organise training in information technology in order to improve job opportunities; to provide childcare services for asylum-seekers who have the right to work; to set up a job recruitment agency; and to run an accommodation agency.

In seeking dialogue with government and statutory agencies, it has encountered a number of difficulties. There is a problem of knowing who to approach in statutory bodies when seeking dialogue or making representations. According to Gabriel Okenla, executive director of the Irish branch, there is no centralised office that can be approached for help or information. He believes this is something that needs to be tackled, and that each government department or agency

should have an information section that is accessible to voluntary organisations that represent clients of that agency.

Overall, the organisation believes there has been little official response to date to the different approaches it has made. As a result, it has adopted a strategy of researching and publishing reports on experiences of racism, as a way of creating understanding of the problem.

In January 2001, with Combat Poverty Agency funding, the organisation held a seminar called 'Ireland, Pluralism and Prejudice'. The seminar was widely reported and the organisation will publish shortly a conference report which will be presented to the Department of Justice. The seminar concluded that the Government was not doing enough to address racism in Ireland. The report will recommend that the views of ethnic minorities be given a voice in the Seanad and that the interests of all immigrants and asylum-seekers be protected through the enactment of a Race Relations Bill.

The Pan-African Organisation is seeking EU funding through the European Refugee Fund for an integration and reception project for asylum-seekers in Ireland. It also is actively seeking funding for research into the experiences of racism of black African communities in Ireland. When completed, a report will be published and disseminated, to raise awareness of racism and to make recommendations to tackle it. It plans also to inquire into the reasons why black African parents find difficulty in placing their children in many schools and to determine if this is due to prejudice or to general under-resourcing of schools.

The organisation is active in trying to change attitudes both among the public generally and the media. It provides speakers to schools and to other organisations in the hope that, by raising issues of discrimination publicly, it will make people more aware of the situation.

The media has been a cause of hostility and high levels of racism, by depicting asylum-seekers as coming solely for money, or as suffering from diseases, according to the Pan-African Organisation.

The organisation is making approaches to the National Union of Journalists, in the hope of promoting more positive reporting. It plans also to hold an open day at its Centre in Moore Street, Dublin, to show journalists the work it is doing, and to hold a round-table conference with the media on racism and discrimination.

(The Pan-African Organisation can be contacted through Gabriel Okenla 01-8897662 or Email: panafrican.organisation@ireland.com.)

Anti-Poverty Work in Action was written by Peigín Doyle

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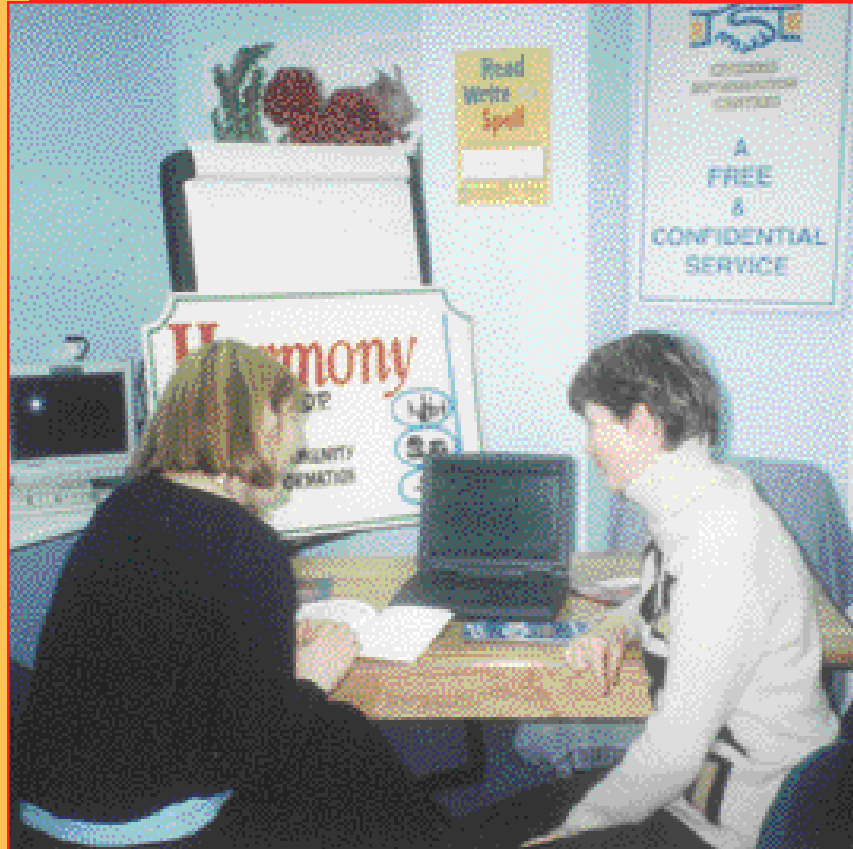
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EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue profiles four groups who received funding under the Combat Poverty Agency's Grants Scheme 'Working Against Poverty'. In particular policy initiatives by these groups are highlighted. Each profile notes the specific strand of the grant scheme and level of funding awarded.

Closing date for the next round of grants is 1st June (see Noticeboard p14.)

If you are involved in anti-poverty work and are interested in being featured in future supplements, please contact the Agency on Tel: 01 6706746 or at oflynnj@cpa.ie



Mary Connellon, Volunteer Attending an outreach clinic in Harmony CDP Athlone

FROM INFORMATION TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Evaluation Grant, £3,000 provided

County Westmeath Citizens Information Service is a countywide information service, whose aim is to ensure people have access to advice and advocacy services in relation to their civil and social rights and their entitlements. The service is run by volunteers who are an important asset. In the mid-1990s, Comhairle (NSSB) established citizens information centres as full-time services and a full-time centre was set up in Athlone in 1998.

In 2000, Combat Poverty Agency funded the service to conduct an evaluation of its relationships with statutory and non-statutory bodies in order to identify gaps in these relationships and increase awareness of its services. This evaluation found that many local agencies and voluntary organisations did not know about or had a limited knowledge of the service.

To address this gap, Westmeath Citizens Information Service set out to recruit members of statutory bodies to sit on its board. It deliberately head-hunted people who had an interest in or commitment to voluntary organisations. Formal training on board structures and the role of board members was provided. This was important in keeping people involved in the service and in strengthening relations with other agencies. The service believed it was important that bodies like Westmeath Community Development and Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs would be represented; that board members would have a broad range of skills, and that there would be countywide representation.

The effectiveness of this strategy can be seen from the success of the Citizens Information Service and Westmeath Community Development in working in partnership to identify and provide new outreach services throughout the county.

Combat Poverty Agency
working for the prevention
and elimination of poverty

