

COUNTY ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP BOARDS

Their Role in Tackling Long-Term Unemployment
and Poverty and Promoting Community Development

A SUBMISSION FROM THE

COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Variety of Objectives

The decision announced in the Joint Fianna Fail and Labour Programme for a Partnership Government, 1993-1997, to press ahead with the establishment of County Enterprise Partnership Boards (CEPBs) is a very significant policy initiative. It has potentially major implications for development at local level. The initiative combines several different objectives that may, or may not, be mutually reinforcing depending on how the CEPBs develop. The objectives include promoting enterprise and tourism at the local level, tackling long-term unemployment and supporting and encouraging local community development. In effect the Boards are intended to be both a new approach to promoting enterprise and job-creation and the means whereby the PESP Area-Based Response to Long-Term Unemployment is extended nationwide.

1.2 Danger of Long-Term Unemployed Losing Out

It is important that all the objectives are given an equal priority and that targeting the disadvantaged is prioritised in implementing each objective. There is clearly a danger that in the development of this new initiative one of the objectives will swamp the others. This is a distinct possibility given the complexity and difficulty of making progress on any of the objectives and given that they originate from rather different quarters.

The objectives of promoting enterprise and addressing long-term unemployment are both very important. They could reinforce one another but will not necessarily do so. In fact they could end up in competition. In particular it is quite conceivable that the major and difficult task of promoting enterprise will require so much energy and effort that it will become dominant. Thus, developing specific programmes for the long-term unemployed and the most disadvantaged communities within counties may only receive limited attention.

One possibility is that some county partnerships may rely on a "trickle down" effect rather than deliberately targeting the long-term unemployed and the most disadvantaged communities. Experience suggests that such an approach is unlikely to be effective. It is also important to note that long-term unemployment and poverty may be concentrated in very specific areas while the creation of enterprise will often be easier in the less disadvantaged areas. Thus the key question that arises is how can one guarantee that there is a focus on the most disadvantaged areas within the county maintained throughout all county enterprise partnership boards.

1.3 Combat Poverty Agency

The Combat Poverty Agency's primary concern is that the most disadvantaged benefit from this new initiative. The Agency is particularly concerned that, as well as leading to a more dynamic and coordinated response to job creation

at the county level, the new initiative builds on the positive lessons emerging from the PESP Area-Based Response to Long-Term Unemployment and other related initiatives like the EC Poverty 3 Programme. This paper thus draws out some of the key elements that will need to be incorporated in this initiative if it is to benefit the long-term unemployed and if it is to contribute to developing an effective and focused response to the needs of the most disadvantaged communities.

The points made in this paper are based on the experience gained from extensive involvement in the PESP Area-Based initiative. The Agency is identified in the Programme for Economic and Social Progress as having a specific role in the Area Based Response to Long-Term Unemployment. Thus it has been represented at the Central Review Committee when the initiative has been discussed. Its director has been involved on an ongoing basis with the National Coordinating Team in planning and advising on the implementation of the initiative. It has been responsible for coordinating and supporting the evaluation of the initiative. It has staff on two of the Partnership Boards. It has facilitated regular meetings of the community representatives on the different partnerships. Many of the Department of Social Welfare funded community development projects around the country, which are supported and monitored by the Agency, are represented on the different partnership boards. The Agency has been responsible for coordinating a special Horizon initiative concerned with those who are unemployed and other disadvantaged groups in many of the PESP areas. It has commissioned material on mapping social need on an area basis that is highly relevant to the issue of targeting disadvantaged areas. All this involvement, combined with the insights it has gained from the EC Poverty 3 programme, one of whose projects is also involved in the PESP initiative, and other similar initiatives around Europe means that it has a very extensive experience on which to draw.

1.4 Structure of Comments

The comments and suggestions about how the proposed new initiative can be developed to ensure that the different objectives reinforce rather than compete with one another are grouped under two broad headings. These are:

Programme

Structures

2. PROGRAMME

2.1 Clear Brief

In addition to their four core objectives and to ensure the retention of a strong focus on social need and long-term unemployment all CEPBs should have four very specific responsibilities within their brief. These are:

- to target the long-term unemployed and those at risk of becoming long-term unemployed including not just those on the live register but also groups like single-parents, women and minority groups such as Travellers;
- to identify the most disadvantaged communities within their county with the highest concentrations of poverty and unemployment;
- to develop integrated area-based responses in the most disadvantaged communities building on the lessons of the 12 pilot partnerships and the EC Poverty 3 programme;
- to "exclusion proof" all other actions they undertake (for instance in the area of tourism) to ensure that as far as possible they contribute to addressing long-term unemployment and do not contribute to creating greater social exclusion or poverty.

2.2 Multidimensional Approach with Clear Action Plans

Experience in Ireland and across Europe suggests that to impact on poverty and disadvantage requires a multi-dimensional approach which combines a focus on economic, social and cultural development. Each can be reinforcing for the other. Thus, each CEPB should be required to ensure that integrated action plans are developed for each of the most disadvantaged communities in their area.

Action plans should be clearly related to the core objectives and should address needs in a comprehensive and holistic manner. Such plans should be developed on the basis of a clear analysis of needs. This will mean that CEPBs will require access to good data and information - the Combat Poverty Agency is currently preparing a guideline for CEPBs on sources of data and how to undertake such an initial study.

The multi-dimensional and integrated approach should be particularly stressed in relation to countering long-term unemployment. CEPBs should be required to go beyond just the creation of enterprises creating economically sustainable jobs and be expected to develop a continuum of educational, training, social and cultural supports for those who have become excluded or detached from the labour market.

2.3 Allocation of Resources

Much of the role of CEPBs will be to coordinate existing strands of policy and redirect the input of a range of existing agencies. However, it is clear that they will also have access to significant additional resources. To date these have been identified as mainly for promoting enterprise. However, under the Global Grant, other areas are eligible. The same should also be the case for future EC allocations and for additional Government monies. Thus

CEPBs should be required to allocate resources to foster social, human and cultural as well as economic development. Trying to develop economic enterprise in disadvantaged communities without at the same time allocating resources to social development will not work. Resources should only be allocated on the basis of clear action plans that adopt a multi-dimensional approach and on the basis of a clear contractual agreement.

2.4 Adequate Time

Developing an integrated and multi-dimensional approach takes considerable time and planning. Failure to allow for this and to rush the process can be counterproductive in the long-term. There must be time allocated to build real partnership between the different sectors. This is especially necessary in Ireland with its historically very centralised and compartmentalised administrative system in which there is no tradition of the different sectors working closely together. Time must also be allowed to ensure that planning is comprehensively undertaken.

3. STRUCTURES

3.1 Community Representation

One of the major strengths of the PESP initiative has been the significant involvement of people representing local voluntary and community groups concerned with issues of poverty and unemployment. To ensure that there is a strong commitment to addressing disadvantage and long-term unemployment and promoting community development as well as enterprise creation at the heart of the CEPBs it is vital that the interests of the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged are also strongly represented at board level.

The current proposals in relation to boards of CEPBs do not adequately allow for such representation. While two of the four functions are specifically to do with long-term unemployment it is proposed that only three members of the Board should come from local community organisations. Furthermore it is not specified that these representatives should come from community groups concerned with disadvantage and unemployment. The creation of specific sub-committees on these matters, while welcome, is no substitute for adequate representation on the main board.

Definition of Community Organisations: It is recommended that the number of representatives from community organisations should be increased. Furthermore, such representatives should come only from those voluntary and community groups concerned specifically with issues of poverty and disadvantage. These would include:

- * groups working with the unemployed (e.g. centres for the unemployed and unemployed action groups);
- * groups concerned with education (e.g. "2nd Chance" groups, literacy groups, further or adult

education groups);

- * groups concerned with training (e.g. of early school leavers and people who are long-term unemployed);
- * groups concerned with community development in the most disadvantaged areas (e.g. community development resource centres);
- * groups representing particularly disadvantaged interests (e.g. women's groups, lone parent groups and Travellers).

Any group wanting to participate on the Board should be able to demonstrate that they have undertaken activities in the areas outlined above for at least six months prior to the establishment of the CEPBs.

Selection Procedure: It is important that there is a clear process of selecting community directors which involves all the relevant voluntary community groups in the county. This will help to ensure that community representatives on the Board feel confident that they are representing their sector not just the individual group they are coming from. Equally importantly all groups should feel happy with the representatives selected. It is thus recommended that there should be an opportunity for these groups to meet together to discuss the initiative, to agree selection procedures and to nominate their representatives. It is important that this process is not rushed and that time is given to explaining the initiative and to ensuring that there is a clearly understood process of selection. It is also suggested that clear mechanisms should be established to enable community directors on CEPBs to give regular report back to all voluntary and community groups concerned with this initiative. Ultimately a network might be established for each county area which would act as an umbrella organisation for all groups concerned with poverty and disadvantage and part of whose function would be to elect community directors to CEPBs. It could be helpful to agree written guidelines for community directors stressing their accountability.

Resourcing Participation: If community representatives are to play a full and effective part on CEPBs experience has shown that it is vital that they are adequately resourced and supported to do this.

Sub-Committees: In addition to direct participation on the boards of CEPBs it will be possible to involve a wider range of groups directly on the sub-committees. In particular the proposal to establish a community development sub-committee will allow for a range of interests to be actively involved. However, it is important that they also have an input into the other sub-committees and that their contribution is not isolated to community development.

3.2 Other Representation

Just as it is important that community directors on CEPBs are representative of and accountable to their constituency so to should representatives of other sectors be accountable to their constituency. One of the problems that has arisen in various initiatives (e.g. COMTEC, PESP, Poverty 3) has been that social partner and statutory representatives have been nominated from the centre and are not perceived locally as representing their constituency. Thus they tend to be seen as participating as individuals and their ability to mobilise their colleagues at the local or county level is seriously impaired.

There is also an important issue for many very centralised statutory agencies as to the extent to which their representatives can commit their agency. This raises very complex issues of the extent to which CEPBs will be separate entities with their own agendas or will be a means of delegating authority from central to local level. It is suggested that in the initial phase these issues should be approached in a fairly flexible manner and different solutions explored before the CEPBs are given a statutory basis. In this regard it could also be useful to examine models for delegating powers and responsibilities from the centre that have been developed in other contexts.

3.3 Key Role of National Coordinating/Implementing Team

Crucial to the success of the initiative will be a very strong team at the centre giving clear leadership and direction to the initiative and ensuring that the experience from the local level is translated into effective policy responses at the national level.

One of the key strengths of the PESP Area Based Response has been the leadership given by the Assistant Secretary in the Department of the Taoiseach. He has had the authority and political backing necessary to ensure that the various different departments and agencies have participated actively in the initiative and to address particular blocks and problems that arose. His position also meant that he was able to engage and negotiate with the Social Partners on their contribution to the initiative and with the EC on its support. His openness and commitment to the active involvement of community groups in the initiative has also been very important. It will be important that the development of the CEPBs receives leadership and support at the same level.

A second critical element is the fact that the implementing team brought together representatives from key departments and agencies and from the social partners, though it has unfortunately lacked someone with specific community development experience. This representation from key sectors and agencies has been vital in ensuring a strong commitment at the centre and has greatly enhanced interdepartmental and inter-sectorial coordination and cooperation. It has also meant that delivery agencies have received great encouragement to allocate resources to and

to respond to and support the efforts at a local level. It has also been important in ensuring that policy issues and problems that arise at the local level can be addressed on an inter-departmental basis at the centre. Furthermore, the fact that this team has had to report on progress to the Central Review Committee at regular intervals has helped to encourage openness and debate on the initiative and has encouraged agencies to participate actively in its implementation. Given that it is proposed that the CEPBs work through a number of sub-committees (i.e. Enterprise, Education/Training, Community Development) it could be useful for the Central Team also to establish similar sub-committees to deal with policy issues that may arise.

Given the complexity and difficulty of developing partnerships the Central Team will have a vital role to play in ensuring that the maximum support is given to boards and staff. In particular there is a clear need to document and pass on the key lessons that have been learned to date. This could involve documenting what makes partnerships function effectively (and what blocks need to be overcome), how to get effective community participation, how to target the most disadvantaged, how to develop effective action plans, how to ensure integrated action and how to promote enterprise in a way which will benefit the long-term unemployed and those most excluded from the labour market and so on. It will also involve organising on-going in-service training programmes especially for staff of CEPBs - given the critical role played by managers in partnership situations it is essential that they are recruited through an open and rigorous selection process.

Another key concern for the National Team will be to ensure coordination between county boards and between them and the IDA if damaging competition is to be avoided. In Britain in the 1980s three industrial development boards were competing with one another. In retrospect this incurred huge deadweight and replacement costs. It will be important to work out ways of avoiding this situation arising. Relations with FAS regional structures will also need to be clarified.

To ensure that the focus on poverty and disadvantage is maintained and to facilitate the focus on community development it will be important that the Combat Poverty Agency has a structured and ongoing role in relation to the work of the national coordination team.

3.4 Links with the Community Development Programme

Given the contribution that the CEPBs are expected to make in the field of community development it will be very important that clear links are established with the Community Development Programme which is funded by the Department of Social Welfare and supported by the Combat Poverty Agency. **Appendix 1** outlines suggestions on how such linkages might work.

3.5 EC Grants and National Management Company

The establishment of ADM Ltd is an important mechanism for allocating EC funds to the local level with a particular focus on assisting disadvantaged groups and areas. In particular it is significant that there are three representatives of the community sector on the board of ADM. This should be continued in the future.

3.6 Sub-County Structures

The establishment of CEPBs should not automatically subsume or seek to control either existing or emerging sub-county structures such as the existing 12 PESP companies nor should they seek to control other local community structures. However in the establishment of totally new CEPBs it will be important to build on the experiences and lessons emerging from the PESP and Poverty 3 initiatives. The role of CEPBs should be to facilitate and support the development of such autonomous local structures. This should be made clear in the brief they are given (see 2.1 above). It will be important to give the existing PESP partnerships some choice as to whether they carry on as before or become more integrated into the wider county structures. In this regard there is likely to be a difference between the rural and urban partnerships.

3.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

It will be very important to establish an ongoing mechanism for evaluating the impact of the CEPBs on long-term unemployment and poverty. Such an inbuilt "exclusion proofing" mechanism will help to encourage Boards to retain a clear focus on disadvantage. In this regard there should be clear guidelines spelled out for identifying and collecting data and existing problems of the availability of data from some agencies should be addressed. The Combat Poverty Agency's experience in relation to the evaluation of the PESP initiative will be important in this regard.

APPENDIX 1

LINKAGES BETWEEN COUNTY ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME PROJECTS

"In order to ensure that disadvantaged communities can be adequately represented in County and sub-County structure, the Community Development Programme funded by the Department of Social Welfare will be continued. Appropriate linkages will be developed between projects in the Community Development Programme and the relevant County Enterprise Boards." - from the Appendix attached to the announcement by the Taoiseach on 1st October 1992 on Enterprise Partnership Boards for every county.

INTRODUCTION

The recognition first in the PESP Area Based Response to Long-term Unemployment and now in the proposed County Enterprise Partnership Boards of the importance of community development is a welcome development. It complements the establishment three years ago by the government of the Community Development Fund in the Department of Social Welfare and the recent announcement of its continuation. This fund was set up to support the establishment of community development resource centres in disadvantaged communities as a means of supporting and encouraging local community activity to tackle problems of poverty and social exclusion.

In recommending the establishment of the Programme the Combat Poverty Agency, in its role as the national community development agency, stressed that this was only one of the developments that needed to happen if community development activity was to be properly supported and resourced. The Agency argued that other government departments and agencies should become more responsive to the needs of local groups and should support a community development approach. In effect the inclusion of a community development remit in the County Enterprise Partnership Boards (CEPBs) gives recognition to this principle.

The important task now is to ensure that effective linkages are developed between local community development resource centre projects and county enterprise partnerships, particularly their community development sub-committees.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

In considering the relationship between community development fund projects and the county enterprise partnerships it is important to be clear at what points they are likely to have similar concerns and what points their agendas will vary. The major difference is that community development fund projects are likely to have a broader range of issues and concerns than county enterprise partnerships.

CEPBs are being set up specifically to address issues of enterprise creation, tourism, education and training support for the unemployed, especially the long-term unemployed, and related community development activity. Community development resource

centre projects have been established to support and encourage local community activity aimed at addressing **all** aspects of poverty and disadvantage. Thus, while sharing a concern about issues of employment creation, economic development and the needs of the unemployed, they are also concerned with the needs of the elderly, women and children, those with disabilities, the homeless, lone-parent families, young people at risk, Travellers and other disadvantaged groups. Depending on the needs of an area, action can range from providing welfare information and advice to supporting playgroups, addressing issues such as housing, health, legal, transport and education services, promoting local arts and cultural initiatives and so on. Thus at times the work of local community development resource centres will relate to that of county enterprise partnerships and at times it will differ.

PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUND PROJECTS

In looking at the relationship with the CEPBs it is important to be clear what the specific remit of DSW funded community development resource centres is. The community development fund projects are intended as mechanisms which will develop the local community infrastructure and will enable individuals and groups in the most disadvantaged communities to assert control over their lives, to participate in decisions that affect them and to be part of a process of change in their area. They have three main functions. These are:

* **Practical Assistance:** This ranges from providing advice and assistance to individuals and local groups (e.g. on welfare entitlements, local services, other groups in the area, on services and facilities, on funding opportunities) to the provision of practical services for local voluntary and community groups (e.g. telephone, photocopying, printing facilities, library, meeting rooms etc.).

* **Developmental Work:** This involves supporting and stimulating the work of local groups by acting as a catalyst for bringing groups together to identify needs, to identify how best these needs can be met, to draw up action plans and so on. They enhance the developmental process in their area - for example by organising training programmes for local projects, helping groups to acquire more skills and confidence, and organising personal development opportunities for local people.

* **Partnership and Cooperation:** Community development resource centres provide a useful mechanism for building good relations between statutory bodies and community groups in an area and between community groups and a range of other interests in an area, for example national voluntary organisations, the churches, local employers and trade unions.

In order to fulfil this support role community development resource centres receive core funding (on average c £50,000 pa) to employ professional staff and cover basic running costs. They do not have a pool of money for supporting specific projects that they may help local groups to develop. They thus have to work

in conjunction with local groups to find this from other sources.

It is important to note that community development resource centres have been most successful where there has been a very clear process for setting them up with expert support, advice and training organised by the Combat Poverty Agency. In these cases time has been spent in developing effective management structures and clear and agreed programmes of work. Problems have arisen in a few cases where at the outset there has not been a clear understanding of the purpose of the community development fund and where sufficient time has not been spent in discussing and monitoring the implementation of an agreed programme of work and ensuring the development of an effective management structure that involves those affected by poverty and disadvantage. It is thus essential that in the future the Combat Poverty Agency, as the national community development agency, continues to ensure that all the community development resource centres receive expert support and back up. Experience over the last three years has also shown that the community development fund projects have benefited significantly from being part of a national programme with all the resulting opportunities for learning from each others' experience and from engaging in joint training initiatives. This should be maintained in the future.

SUGGESTED RELATIONSHIP WITH COUNTY ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP BOARDS

1. To ensure that there is the maximum cooperation between CEPBs and community development resource centres in their area it is suggested that (in counties where they exist) at least one of the places reserved for local community organisations on the boards of the partnerships should be allocated to a representative of community development resource centres in the county.

2. All community development resource centres should be represented on the community development sub-committees of partnerships.

3. The terms of reference of the community development sub-committee of the partnerships should specifically acknowledge the role of DSW funded community development resource centres in supporting general community development in the most disadvantaged communities and should encourage partnerships to consider providing additional resources (such as funds for additional staff or for running courses in community leadership/capacity building) to resource centres where they are specifically involved in community development activity in their local community concerned with enterprise creation and tackling the effects of unemployment. The experience of PESP Area Based Partnerships has shown that in many cases a considerable amount of staff and management time in community development resource centres has gone in to supporting the partnerships. This has been at the expense of their general work in their community. Thus community development sub-committees should be encouraged to provide them with additional funds to facilitate this involvement, particularly in situations where sub-county integrated development initiatives are established to tackle concentrations of social and economic disadvantage in particular communities.

4. The community development sub-committees of partnerships should develop funding criteria which will be responsive to projects and initiatives being encouraged and supported by community development resource centres.

5. Community Development Resource Centres should be encouraged to prepare proposals for the community development sub-committees outlining possible community development initiatives in relation to enterprise and unemployment which could be supported by the partnerships. In particular they could advise sub-committees on models of community enterprise development appropriate to their area.

6. The community development sub committees of CEPBs should identify the most disadvantaged communities in their area which do not have community development resource centres and enter into discussions with the Combat Poverty Agency and the Department of Social Welfare on a process to develop the conditions whereby such centres in these areas which would be funded by the DSW Community Development Fund.

7. The Combat Poverty Agency, which is responsible for supporting and monitoring the community development resource centres, should also be available to advise and assist the community development sub-committees of the CEPBs on developing coherent and coordinated community development strategies. They should also liaise regularly with community development staff employed by county enterprise partnerships in order to facilitate exchange of information and ideas and to organise relevant in-service training opportunities.

8. The Combat Poverty Agency should continue to liaise closely with the team responsible for implementing the initiative and with the relevant officials in the Department of Enterprise and Employment.

9. Periodic meetings should take place between the Department of Enterprise and Employment, the Department of Social Welfare and the Combat Poverty Agency to review the linkages between the community development programme and the CEPBs and to discuss the extension of the community development programme to new areas.