Peer Review in the Field of Social Inclusion Policies

www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net

Portugal 2005

Shira Mehlman

Support for social and community development

Comment Paper, Ireland

on behalf of

European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities

INBAS EUROPEAN CENTRE NIZW innovation in care and welfare INBAS sozialforschung

Introduction

Over the last 17 years, Ireland has operated under partnership governance. The government's aim in entering into this form of 'decision-making' was to maximise economic and social growth by seeking guarantees that would create a stable industrial environment and address social issues such as social inclusion, poverty and equality. In 1996, 'Partnership 2000', admitted the Community and Voluntary Sector as a fourth pillar to the process; their role is to represent the interests of marginalized constituents. Their influence is evident in measures and initiatives committed to tackle social inclusion and inequality. In 2003, the current national partnership agreement, 'Sustaining Progress' set down ten Special Initiatives including commitments to tackle issues contributing to: child poverty; educational disadvantage; long-term unemployed, care of children, people with disabilities and older people; migration and interculturalism; housing and accommodation and alcohol and drug abuse. Progress against these objectives is reported to the social partners on a regular basis throughout the agreement.

At regional and local level, 34 County and City Development Boards (CDBs) were established by the Irish Government in 2000. The CDBs are led by the Local Authorities and include the social partners, State Agencies, local development organisations and community and voluntary representatives. To improve better coordination of social inclusion activities at local level each Board established a Social Inclusion Measure (SIM) Co-ordinating Group. One of the primary goals of CDBs/SIMs is to ensure that the development of local social inclusion strategies that underpin and strengthen national actions and policies through:

- the endorsement of local and/or community development plans leading to greater cohesion amongst agencies;
- developing and monitoring the implementation of proposals from local and/or community development groups aimed at greater cohesion in service provision;
- developing and implementing 'integrated and targeted plans' specifying target groups, priorities, measures to be undertaken, and how integration among the agencies will be achieved.

Recently, the Government has directed a range of community and local development bodies to have their annual work plans submitted to CDBs for endorsement, in order to support 'greater coherence at local level'.

In addition, the Community Development Programme aims to reduce poverty and social exclusion through targeting support at disadvantaged and socially excluded communities, by providing them with aid that will improve their capacity to benefit from economic and social development. The Programme, operated by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, provides funding, on a multi-annual basis, to a network of 175 community development resource centres and projects in disadvantaged communities. This funding covers core costs such as staff and overheads.

€20.6 million has been allocated to the Programme in 2004. Projects funded include training or education programmes to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups in their communities. The Programme also provides funding for groups that act as a resource for community development work with particular interest groups, i.e., disabled people, members of the traveller community, lone parents, etc. Other initiatives that support social and community development include:

RAPID: In 2001, the Ireland's Government initiated RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development). RAPID is a national programme aimed at improving the quality of life and the opportunity available to the residents of the most disadvantaged communities in Irish cities and towns. It primary aim was 'to enhance the opportunities for communities to participate in the strategic improvement of their areas' based on the principle of 'community participation and local ownership'. There are 2 Strands of the RAPID Programme - Strand I targets 25 urban areas while Strand II targets 20 provincial towns around the country. Each locality has an Area Implementation Team (AITs) consisting of representatives from State Agencies, Local Community Development Programmes, Drug Task Forces and local residents. Each of these AITs is serviced by a RAPID Co-ordinator who is employed by the Local Authority. This programme is managed and monitored by the SIM, or by a City or County Monitoring Group, where a SIM does not exist (See County Development Board).

Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP): The LDSIP aims to counter disadvantage and promote equality and social and economic inclusion through the implementation of strategic plans that target the most excluded individuals including vulnerable children. The Programme is managed by Area Development Management (ADM) on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and is delivered at local level by 38 Partnerships,

33 Community Groups and 4 Territorial Employment Pacts. Each of these groups prepares a strategic plan setting out objectives, actions and targets across three sub-measures - Services for the Unemployed, Community Development and Community Based Youth Initiatives, designed to address poverty and social inclusion in their areas. In 2003, 31,777 people were supported under the Services to the Unemployed measure and 9,351 people participated in education and training programmes. The Community Development measure of the Programme, supported 1,654community-based projects and 184 small-scale infrastructural projects. Over the course of the year, the Community Based Youth Initiatives sub-measure assisted a further 40,521 young people and 13,806 adults.

Relevance

Ireland has a varied range of different initiatives which facilitate community participation and social partnership at national, regional and local level. Subsequently, the actions specified under this measure are already integrated into Ireland's operation under the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the National Employment Action Plan, among others. Yet, in spite of this wealth of experience, many of the issues raised by the measures under review, such as national and local interface; resources; protocol development between members of the networks to facilitate service integration; impact assessments for participants and beneficiaries, to name a few, continue to arise. Subsequently, a more detailed overview of this measure, as implemented within Portugal, and the contribution and experiences of the other peer countries as part of the overall review, could potentially provide alternative and viable solutions towards addressing these issues.

Transferability (and condition of application)

Ireland's community development practitioners are facing a range of new challenges arising out of the contradictory environment in which they work, and in this regard community development work needs to evolve. Specifically, many community groups have a particular operating framework when responding to social problems. Normally historical, these frameworks reflect the rationale, organisational form and everyday practices of the community group. Arising from European and national influences, community groups are now being introduced

to paradigms that are different to familiar frameworks including active citizenship, social capital, social entrepreneurship, capacity building, and community building. While some community groups embraced these new discourses (or part thereof), many perceived these new 'frameworks' as means by which community development will be taken over either by the state or market-led organisations. Subsequently, these new 'frameworks' requires openness for change. To overcome these perceptions and to strengthen the effectiveness of community groups in responding to this changing environment, targeted interventions and funding for these interventions must be considered. In this context, several of the sub-measures outlined provide potential mediums to facilitate this process, particularly the development of diagnostic tools and training to 'development agents' (Actions 5.1.2.1, 5.1.1.2 and 5.1.2.3).

Questions

Development at local level cannot be done in a vacuum. Community Development, while meeting local needs, must be coherent, and should integrate and influence national strategic frameworks. To overcome this, in the first instance, community and voluntary groups must be better informed about decision-making within policy development and implementation. In this context:

- How has the Social Security administration facilitated this interface between national policies and local initiatives?
- What are the selection criteria, and how does it ensure relevancy with social security policy?
- Is there a mechanism through which local projects are able to influence national social security policy?
- Are local projects 'mainstreamed' into national provision?

Given that resources are limited, how are priorities within the community defined and identified? In this scope, are there established systems and safeguards build into the measure to ensure that minority interests and views are built into the community actions or projects instigated?

To assist in developing sustainability, are projects built on existing community structures, and/or do they develop links with existing fora already present in the community?