

# The NAPInclusion Social Inclusion Forum

Peter Kelly  
EAPN UK/Poverty Alliance  
Chris Burston  
Department for Work and Pensions

## Introduction

This paper has been produced jointly by a representative of EAPN UK and of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in the UK Government. Both have been involved in the ongoing development of structures and processes designed to improve engagement from a range of stakeholders in the development of the UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion

## 1. A brief assessment of the possible relevance of the SIF to the United Kingdom

The SIF appears to be a real attempt to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, particularly those from outside local or national government, in the development of the NAP Inclusion. The Host Country Report acknowledges the importance of engagement of a wide range of stakeholders, particularly those with experience of poverty, and of the need for formal institutional structures to allow this engagement. These are issues which have been important to both to NGOs engaged in the development of the NAP and to the UK Government. Over the last seven years the DWP and various NGOs in the UK (coming together at the Social Policy Task Force, SPTF) have held regular meetings to contribute to the development of the NAP. Over time this collaboration has resulted in a number of outputs, including the *Get Heard* project<sup>i</sup>, the *Bridging the Policy Gap* project<sup>ii</sup>, and the setting up of NAP Inclusion Stakeholder Group, a cross departmental, cross Government body overseeing the development of the NAP which also involves NGOs. Given these initiatives and the need for them to be built on, it clear that the SIF and the processes that processes behind it are relevant to the UK.

### 1.1 Social exclusion problems

As a process the SIF is not focused on directly solving problems associated with social exclusion, that is, it does not provide direct resources to people experience poverty, does not improve the educational outcomes of children, ensure that health inequalities are reduced, etc. However, by building dialogue between a range of partners it can lay the foundations for more effective responses to these problems and many others. In this way, engagement of stakeholders in the process of policy development should not be seen as an 'added extra' with regard to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, but should be an essential part of it. It would appear that this understanding is at the heart of the SIF. Those who have actively engaged in similar processes in the UK would share this view.

## 1.2 Positive aspects

### *1.2.1 Resources to build capacity*

There would appear to have been clear resources invested to ensure that people had the capacity to be involved in discussions at the SIF. This is a vital element of any participatory process, and one that is often over-looked. There is recognition therefore of the need to engage both local and national NGOs as well as those experiencing social exclusion in discussions about the future of national policy. Without resources to support this engagement, the input from these important actors will be less meaningful. Providing these resources to trusted intermediaries can build credibility for the process.

### *1.2.3 High level engagement*

There appears to be senior level engagement in both the planning of the SIF and its implementation. This is important to give credibility to the event and the process behind it for those who are attending. Such high level engagement is also important to demonstrate that people are being listened to. It also creates the opportunity for the issues raised at the SIF to be taken forward in the relevant departments.

### *1.2.4 On-going process*

Very often consultative processes are one-off events, where many participants will be unaware of the impact or the outcomes of the process. The fact that the SIF is an annual event, linked into some capacity building work and with links to other processes presents the opportunity to have regular, structured dialogue about the direction of anti-poverty and social inclusion policy. This opportunity is important in ensuring that that dialogue and participation are part of the institutional framework for policy development around poverty issues.

### *1.2.5 Early Identifier*

Related to the last point, the type of regular dialogue that the SIF represents, appears to be able to provide another way for policy makers to identify critical emergent policy issues. The Host Paper mentions the issue of migration, but our experience in the UK has shown that this type of engagement can also identify problems with the implementation of current policy which can have important lessons for the development of future policy.

### 1.3 Points to be strengthened

#### *1.3.1 Impact*

A key question that is raised about any consultative or participatory process relates to the question of impact. The host paper does not identify areas where there has been a direct impact on policy, either in changing existing policy or in the introduction of new initiatives. Clearly there are limits to what should be expected from one particular process or series of events, but in order to retain support and credibility it is vital that there is a demonstration of where change is taking place. This is related to the question of monitoring and evaluation raised below.

#### *1.3.2 Consultation or dialogue?*

The SIF appears to have a number of objectives covering information provision, consultation on existing or planned policies, and the evaluation of the previous NAP. There a need for a clearer statement of what the SIF is for and where it fits with other processes that will contribute to the development of social exclusion policy. A clearer statement would help clarify, for all participants, whether the SIF is an opportunity to influence policy or to be informed about it.

#### *1.3.3 Monitoring*

Both the Host paper and the Discussion paper mention of lack of formal evaluation of the SIF process. A more robust evaluation process will help provide solutions to the issues identified above. It is essential that any evaluation process should involve all the stakeholders and it should be an ongoing part of the SIF. It would also be useful for this be carried out independently of Government. The focus of the evaluation should not simply be on how successful the SIF was as an event, but whether it is having an impact on the development of policy: are different things being done than would have been done otherwise?

### 1.4 Fit with policy and legislative context

As described above there are a range of activities underway in the UK that show a good fit with current priorities in the UK. Many of the policy priorities in the UK are similar to those in Ireland – reducing child poverty, access to the labour market, tackling discrimination, etc. In the UK the participative processes that have developed around the NAP Inclusion are not well linked into the legislative processes within the national and devolved Parliaments and Assemblies. A particular challenge in the UK would be to ensure that any SIF-style initiative aimed at broadening involvement in social inclusion policy would be responsive enough to the complex system of policy making in the UK.

## 2. A brief assessment of the potential transferability of the SIF

As suggested above, there is no doubt that the model developed in Ireland could be transferred to the UK. The basis for transference exists in the work that has already been carried out in relation to the *Get Heard* project, *Bridging the Policy Gap*, the NAP Stakeholder Group, and the SPTF-DWP dialogue. There are questions of scale – the UK being a significantly larger country – and the complexity of the political set up. These are obstacles that would make implementation difficult, but would not make it impossible. Other factors that would hinder implementation in the UK include:

### 2.1 Lack of dedicated resources

A notable feature of the SIF process is the availability of resources to carry out capacity building to support engagement and feed in to the SIF. At the moment this is something that is not consistently available in the UK. Although some resources are available to help participation in consultations, there are generally available at the local level and do little to build the capacity of organisations attempting to engage grassroots organisations in national policy discussions. Without such dedicated resources, building the capacity of grassroots groups will always be a fragmented and voluntary process.

### 2.2 Coordination

As mentioned above the UK now has a complex institutional structure. Although responsibility for the development of the NAP rests with a department of UK Government, responsibility for the delivery of the wide range of policies that impact on poverty and social exclusion also sits with devolved Government that have different powers and responsibilities. Add to this the significant and important role of Local Government and the picture becomes even more complex. Coordination between all these layers would be a challenge for adopting a meaningful SIF model in the UK.

## 3. A brief assessment of the possible ways to measure the results or the impact of the SIF

See 1.3.3 above

#### 4. A note of important questions about the policy

As mentioned above organisations involved in EAPN in the UK are actively involved in discussions, both with other NGOs and the UK Government, about how the processes that feed into the development of the NAP Inclusion can be made to be more participatory and about how these processes can be seen to have greater impact. A number of projects have been developed that have taken developed ideas about how this can be done in practice (Get Heard, Bridging the Policy Gap). Some of the questions that are regularly raised in relation to issues that are relevant to the SIF include:

- Resourcing for intermediary organisations and grassroots groups to support engagement in processes;
- Impact on policy of participation;
- Relationship between social inclusion policy and other key policy areas, particularly health, employment and housing;
- Links between local implementation and national policy formation;
- The use of participatory processes and fora to increase public understanding of poverty issues;
- Engagement of National and 'regional' parliaments in discussions regarding the development of NAP Inclusion

#### 5. The potential contribution of the SIF to the content of NAPs/inclusion

Engagement with stakeholders is key to the UK Government's approach to the NAP and Ireland's experience of developing and running the SIF offers important lessons for us. As indicated earlier in this comment paper, the SIF has successfully addressed a number of issues which we are facing in the UK. These include:

- securing high level engagement in the participation process;
- gaining funding for the SIF itself and for supporting processes of engagement; and
- sustaining an ongoing process

For the UK NAP, we are developing a Stakeholder Group which has many similarities with the SIF and we intend to use experience gained in this Peer Review to strengthen this Group.

## 6. Key issues and main questions proposed for debate at the review meeting

The discussion above encapsulates some of the key issues from the UK perspective. The questions below are some that could usefully be addressed at the review meeting:

- How to ensure the engagement of a wider range of key policy stakeholders (local government, trade unions, faith based organisations, community organisations, employers)
- How to ensure that the participation of those experiencing poverty is 'real' – not tokenistic
- How to use the process of dialogue to support the wider public engagement in questions related to poverty and social exclusion.
- How to ensure a greater level of policy impact (avoidance of talking shop)
- How to ensure the engagement of those experiencing poverty that are not 'organised'.
- How to ensure that there is impact across a range of policy areas, beyond those currently associated with social inclusion issues.

---

<sup>i</sup> See [www.ukcap.org/getheard/](http://www.ukcap.org/getheard/) for further details

<sup>ii</sup> See [www.povertyalliance.org/btpg/](http://www.povertyalliance.org/btpg/) for further details