

The Programme for developing local plans for social inclusion in Catalonia

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1. Introduction/Summary

EAPN¹ is an independent network of national and EU NGOs working together with people experiencing poverty who are actively engaged in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Founded in 1990, EAPN has been a key actor in lobbying for the Social OMC and working as a key stakeholder at national level with the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion and National Strategic Reports. EAPN has always supported the crucial role of National Action Plans on social inclusion to ensure ownership and visibility for the OMC, and to develop effective, integrated and multidimensional solutions to preventing as well as alleviating poverty together with key stakeholders. EAPN has consistently highlighted the need to extend the process to the regional and local area, in a bottom-up mechanism, so as to enable the effective engagement of local civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty in a territorial context closest to the reality of poverty. Stakeholders need to be engaged meaningfully at all stages: in the drafting, implementation and review of effective local plans to prevent and fight poverty and social exclusion.²

In general, EAPN considers the Catalan case study an important, potentially useful and transferrable example of development of local action plans in a specific region. Its strengths lie in the comprehensiveness of the model, the commitment to wide-ranging stakeholder involvement – particularly with civil society organisations, the systematic approach to rolling out the approach with a large number of Local Authorities. However, the degree of transferability is undermined by the lack of written information on the implementation itself and the limited details on the methodology used to involve stakeholders, as well as the lack of systematic evaluation of the process and outcomes, particularly in terms of involvement and concrete results for people experiencing poverty.

A strong merit is the seeming depth of the political commitment to forge ahead promoting comprehensive LAPS despite an increasingly negative political context. However, the transferability capacity is likely to be affected by national government's recovery/austerity packages which will exacerbate the risks of poverty and social exclusion, as well as the risks/opportunities presented by the current Europe 2020 strategy. In this, EAPN highlights particular concern over the current proposals related to the social OMC and the Flagship Platform which appear to undermine the commitment to maintain and strengthen National Action Plans, as well as regional and local action planning for social inclusion linked to the Social OMC.

¹ See EAPN website www.eapn.eu

² Building Trust, Giving Hope. EAPN Assessment of the 2008-11 National Action Plans.

2. Assessment of Host Good Practice

In this section, we consider key elements of the practice which can be considered as good practice, their degree of transferability and some gaps.

The model is developed through a well-grounded analysis of the causes and impact of social inclusion, and sets out a systematic approach to implementation, which if followed could provide an effective approach to local action planning. However, there are some important gaps in terms of the scope of the objectives, the method, the decision-making structure and implementation which could limit its effectiveness as well as its transferability.

2.1 The model

- *Common multidimensional principles but lacking rights frame*
 These principles go beyond an individual perspective, including assessment of the community context, emphasizing the multidimensional aspects of poverty beyond income, the need for an overarching strategic approach and putting participation at the centre. However they miss a focus on inequality as a core principle/cause of poverty and would have gained from rooting the principles in a more explicit human rights framework.
- *Integrated Social Inclusion Pillars but limited scope*
 The pillars outlined highlight an integrated approach including economic, social and community, and citizenship and participation – however the economic is interpreted very narrowly, linked really only to employment. An assessment could have been made of how far the economy serves the local population, reduces inequality and helps promote social cohesion. Other elements that could have been more strongly emphasized include fighting discrimination and ensuring equal access to affordable, quality services, indeed more explicitly emphasizing an integrated active inclusion approach (ensuring access to adequate minimum income, quality services and an inclusive labour market).
- *Embedding sustainable planning cycle but needs attention to mainstreaming*
 The goals go beyond the development of a static plan to attempting to embed a long-term and sustainable process of network/dialogue with key stakeholders and government agents. More attention could have been given to establishing the causes of poverty and social exclusion. Another key objective could have been to raise the awareness of the local community helping to change attitudes, as well as a more specific attention to how the approaches will be mainstreamed throughout government practice.
- *Effective but overly top-down decision-making structure*
 The model is strongly driven from the top, and follows a rather traditional hierarchical structure with a Steering Committee made up of only political level, linked to an Executive Committee with only technical government officer input. Whilst this provides strong political leadership, it runs the danger of undermining participation, ownership and the accountability as well as the visibility of the planning process. Examples from Ireland, for example show the tendency to insist on a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee (see later section), which can

provide the vision, and drive the implementation process, ensuring that it remains open to innovative, community solutions.

- *Horizontal coordination between service providers rather than civil society stakeholder engagement*

The major emphasis is increasing the horizontal coordination between key actors engaged in service provision including territorial services, social entities and the third sector. Social entities therefore appeared to be valued primarily as service deliverers for people at risk. Users and people in exclusion, as well as the general public are considered as a separate category. Whilst the service provider role of NGOs is crucial, it underestimates the importance of civil society organizations as advocacy agents as well as supporting the empowerment and collective organization of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion which is crucial to effective and sustainable participation. It would also be necessary to get more detail on the specific methodology used, and how this engagement was resourced – in terms of people, capacity-building, time, skills, and sustainable financing.

- *Effective project management cycle but participation restricted to later stages*

The stages established follow a fairly classic project management cycle, with efforts to include all actors at all stages. However, it is not clear how far all actors are engaged in the crucial diagnosis stage, and how open this methodology is to mapping the current reality of poverty and social exclusion, analyzing the broader causes and developing common solutions. The dangers at this stage can be of pre-judging the key issues to be developed, and limiting the creativity and effectiveness of the plan's proposals, as well as the degree of real participation of relevant stakeholders, including the people themselves.

2.2 Implementation, evaluation and mainstreaming – key challenges

- *Joining up: top down to bottom up*

One of the key success elements is the strong political backing from the Catalan region to developing LAPs across the region with a common methodology and framework, involving 32 local authorities with 9 more in the pipeline in 2010. However, the strengths/weaknesses and risks/opportunities of such a strongly top-down driven model, when trying to promote bottom-up mechanisms is not fully explored. The dangers of this are clearly the tendency for applicant authorities to 'tick boxes', concerned with funding opportunities, rather than taking full ownership of the objectives and process, and adapting them to the needs/concerns of their own particular area.

- *Developing systematic, participative monitoring and evaluation*

The evaluation process seems underdeveloped. The criteria used for assessment include how far the delivery was cross-cutting, comprehensive, participation, networking and specific planning. However no concrete quantitative data is included and it is unclear how the qualitative data was developed. It would seem important to clarify who and how the key stakeholders were involved in the monitoring and evaluation process, particularly in the assessment of qualitative criteria. Our concern would be particularly to know how the third sector, Social NGOs and people experiencing poverty were engaged and their views. Criteria that could have been employed are the type, degree and effectiveness of participation with

specific target groups, evaluating particularly the effectiveness of different methodology to engage different groups in the process.

- *Mainstreaming*

One of the key concerns that we would have expected to have come out more strongly would be how far the local level has the competences and is able to deliver solutions to some of the core problems related to tackling social inclusion. For example it is clear that many of the key decisions are taken at national level (for example financing for universal services, employment policy, minimum income, tax policy etc). In this context, more clarity needs to be given to how the local level is able to channel up concerns related to policies defined at the regional, sub-national, and indeed EU level.

3. Key Issues and Concerns

In this section we highlight 3 key concerns in the LAP process for EAPN networks.

3.1 Getting a dynamic governance process that delivers concrete results

- *Communicable goals*

A core concern for making effective regional and local action plans is the need to clarify and make more concrete the goals of the plans. In the Combat Poverty Agency Guide developed in Ireland in 2005, a strong vision/statement of goals that were transparent and easily communicable to stakeholders and general public, were key to the ownership by stakeholders of the process. These were:

- 1) Effective and accessible public services
- 2) Involving community and people in poverty
- 3) Considering the needs of vulnerable groups in all areas of planning.

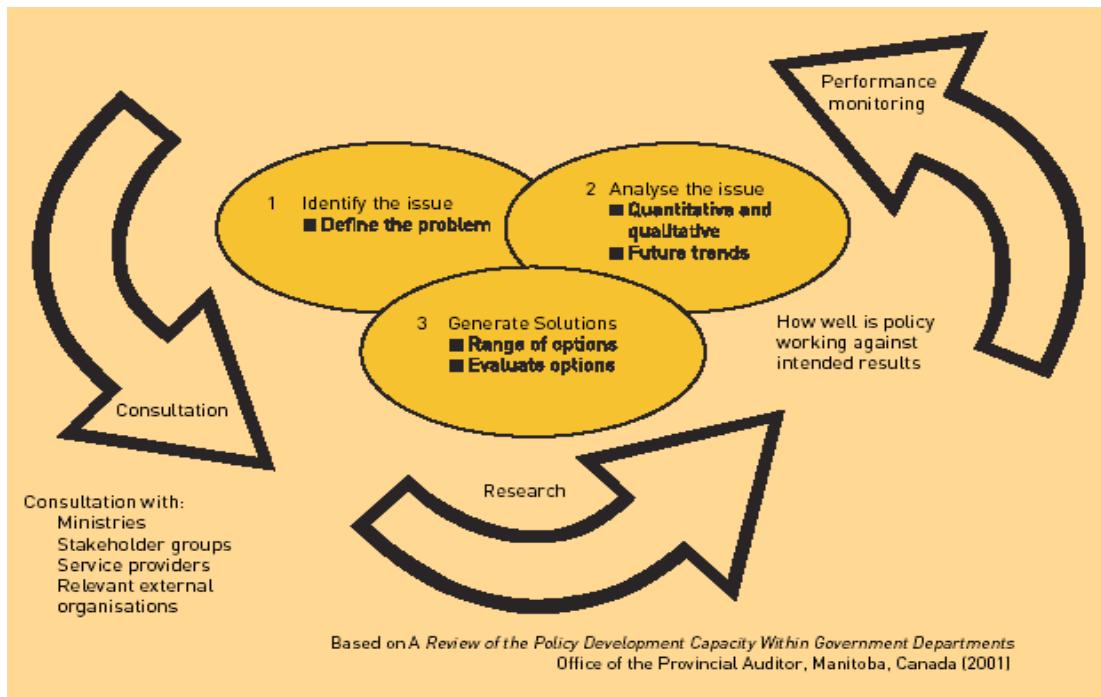
- *Effective project cycle tools and instruments*

It is also crucial to ensure the right questions are asked in the diagnosis, involving stakeholders in effective dialogue and establishing a logical process to establish the causes and effective solutions, recognizing the explicit limitations of local competences.

In the LAPS and RAPS Progress project anti-poverty NGOs were involved in the implementation phase in several countries. The project established a 9 step methodology:

- Step 1 Building the evidence base
- Step 2 Stakeholder analysis
- Step 3 Problem and option analysis
- Step 4 Option analysis and strategy formulation
- Step 5 Intervention logic – going from themes to activities
- Step 6 Adding indicators, setting targets and working out means of verification
- Step 7 Risks and assumptions
- Step 8 Bringing it all together and achieving coherence by using an adapted logical framework
- Step 9 Formal signing of the inclusion framework by all the partners

The diagram below illustrates the circular nature of the project cycle:



Particularly important is Step 3: Problem and Option analysis. A fresh and comprehensive understanding of the existing situation and the problems that exist is essential to enabling the right solutions to be found. Stakeholder involvement in this stage will expand the way that the problem is perceived and ensure that problems are not merely 'agency' views. It is particularly important to involve the users or beneficiaries (the primary stakeholders) are engaged in problem and needs analysis.

The action plan needs to recognise that problems facing the groups are complex, intractable and inter-connected. No simple solutions are likely to work and 'business as usual' approaches by existing agencies need to be challenged because it is the nature of the problems facing the groups combined with the inadequacy of social policy responses that have created the problems found today.

There are many different ways of viewing the same problem. One well established technique for working with problems in a group setting is to make a [problem tree](#). This is a simple graphical representation of the problems, their causes and effects.

- *National and Regional Government backing for integrated strategies*

The capacity of the plan to deliver results will be linked finally to the decisions over competences and financial spending at the different government levels. In the Combat Poverty Agency Final Report "Mapping social inclusion in local authorities" (Dec 2007), where 10 Local Authorities out of 29 had developed local action plans on social inclusion, a key concern was the clash over competences at central and local level (where decisions are made, where the money come from and how it is spent). The report highlighted that finance increasingly depended on national measures and objectives. 'There needs to be a whole government approach to developing integrated strategies at local level'.

3.2 Building meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty

- *Necessary governance elements*

As highlighted by the recent Belgian Presidency publication '(H. Frazer, E. Marlier and I. Nicaise 2010)³, stakeholder involvement is not just a principle of democratic decision-making, 'it guarantees a more evidence-based design of policies and improves their effectiveness through stronger consensus and ownership'. They highlight 5 dimensions: 1) vertical integration across government levels, 2) horizontal coordination across different policy areas, 3) involvement of different types of stakeholders, including civil society organisations and people experiencing poverty 4) the time dimension – ensuring involvement in the design, monitoring and evaluation and most importantly the 5) the depth of involvement. This final element depends on getting the pre-requisites right for effective participation right, clarifying the type/goal of participation and investing in appropriate methodologies.

- *Pre-requisites for effective participation*

EAPN has devoted a specific publication to the issue of stakeholder participation, particularly of people experiencing poverty⁴, which highlights that 'time and mutual understanding are two key factors to ensure the meaningful participation of people experiencing poverty. It takes time for people to feel prepared to share their lives, and engage in dialogue and understanding on both sides. For people experiencing poverty participation starts with building their self-esteem and confidence, getting the courage to overcome stigma and discrimination, express their opinions as equals, to participate in making decisions and implementing them.

The role of NGOs supporting people in poverty, both directly and as representatives is crucial. In Ireland, the Local Action Plans developed with the support of the Combat Poverty Agency recognized the need for investment in resources for effective participation– ensuring that sufficient representative people are able to participate (particularly different target groups), providing capacity building and training, ensuring accessible information and feedback, guaranteeing adequate physical facilities which welcome all contributors on an equal basis, and providing adequate financing for both expenses. Finally investment in the organisation and empowerment of people experiencing poverty implies investing in sustainable financing of their organisations and the NGOs that support them.

- *Clarifying the type/goal of participation*

Not all participation has the same goal. EAPN distinguishes 4 stages, building on the experience of the Combat Poverty Agency, based on 1) Information, 2) Consultation, 3) Participation and 4) Co-decision. In the Local and Regional Action Planning process moving beyond consultation (where stakeholders can express their views, but not be involved in the making of the decision) is essential, to participation where stakeholders like people experiencing poverty can contribute and have ability to influence the outcomes, to co-decision where a consensus is reached during the process, policies are arrived at jointly and there is joint ownership of the final outcome. A key element to the commitment to the more ambitious goals, is the composition and functioning of the Steering group. i.e. in Local Action

³ H. Frazer, E. Marlier, I. Nicaise, A social inclusion roadmap for Europe 2020 (Sept 2010), Belgian Presidency/Garant Antwerp.

⁴ EAPN (2009) Small Steps- Big Changes: building the participation of people experiencing poverty, Brussels.

Groups supported by the Combat Poverty Agency in Ireland the steering groups bring together all key actors, not just the local authority staff or political representatives, involving outside agencies, people in poverty and anti-poverty NGOs – with the explicit goal of developing a shared vision, aims and methods.

- *Investing in innovative/ creative methodologies*

Effective participation of people experiencing poverty and civil society stakeholders often means moving beyond traditional meeting methodologies. EAPN Networks engaged in national, regional and local action plans on social inclusion, highlight the importance of pre-preparation and capacity-building with the target groups – to enable them to build confidence, and clarify their key ideas, and to engage with the planning process, as well as the development of more dynamic, participative methodologies based on community development principles.

For example in Belgium, 2 key methodologies have been developed to help people experiencing poverty and supporting NGOs engage in the action plan processes at regional, local and national level:

1) 'Experience Experts' which involves capacity building individuals who experience poverty to enable them to not only communicate his/her own experience/analysis and solutions but to serve as an interpreter and 'bridging function' aiding those with similar experiences and to translate the experience and learning into elements that can be assimilated in the action plan. In Belgium this is developed through a four year part-time training programme, the training is recognized and experts employed by the Regional and several local governments.

2) The second methodology is the development of 'dialogue groups', where associations are specifically funded by the federal and national government to enable people experiencing poverty to engage in the development of the general report on poverty, and in regional and national action plans. There are three phases to the method. The first phase is where the poor take the floor – with their own debates in each association on key themes related to the action plan. The second phase is consultation with 'private and public service partners' where support agencies/workers debate and add their expertise to the Associations proposals arriving at a consensus. The third phase is direct intervention in the action plan process with policy bodies – government agencies, departments and politicians. This process takes on average 6 months.

- Other important examples of participatory methodologies are highlighted by REAPN (Portugal) which organized 6 regional forums to give a participatory voice to disadvantaged groups, feeding into regional plans (2002). This was followed by the Activating Participation project (2005-6) which developed observatories on participation and developed capacity building for the social agents involved and developed new tools and methods of participation⁵ (see www.reapn.org).
- The Get Heard project ran in the UK, funded through the EU Community Action programme from December 2004 for one year, with a total of 146 workshops taking place across the UK. More than 1,000 people with direct experience of poverty participated. A full report from the project was submitted to the DWP as part of the input to the development of the NAP in 2006, and a summary of the report was published as an annex to the NAP (DWP, 2006). Officials

⁵ REAPN (2006), Small experiences, great hopes. Oporto.

preparing the NAP Social Inclusion 2006-08 used the input from the Get Heard reports, but the activities also had a wider impact. Additional regional reports were produced in Merseyside and in Scotland. The Scottish report also formed the basis of a meeting between people with experience of poverty and the Communities Committee in the Scottish Parliament (Burnett, 2006).

- The UK Bridging the Policy Gap project, financed under the EC Awareness-raising programme built on the experience of the Get Heard project mentioned above and developed a 'Peer Review' process focussing on key policy objectives and challenges, where people experiencing poverty operated as equal peers to other experts including involving local and regional authorities, and other stakeholders, with a specific focus on the implementation of key government priorities: children's play (Swansea), access to employment for disabled people (Newham) and challenging family poverty (Glasgow). Key success elements were – ensuring the diversity of participants, engaging people in poverty at all stages, including in the reference or steering group, and the quality of the capacity-building preparation ((Mackenzie & Kelly, 2008) (see www.povertyalliance.org).

3.3 Threats and Opportunities for LAP/(RAPs) in current EU policy context

- *Building on existing learning*

As the discussion paper points out, the model proposed needs to be set in the context of EU history of bottom up development of local action planning related to social inclusion concerns, and build on this learning. Particularly relevant are the methodologies developed through LEADER (rural) and Urban and Urbact (urban) methodologies, as well as the strategies developed in some countries to deliver integrated approaches to Structural Funds, with particular reference to Equal projects.

Regional and Local Action Plans specifically for social inclusion have been promoted since the 1990's in several key member states – we would highlight the experience particularly in Ireland, Belgium and currently Spain and its regions, but other interesting experiences which EAPN members have been engaged in Portugal, Italy, Sweden, UK. The Social OMC has indeed continually supported the development of RAPs and LAPs, particularly emphasized in the Commission's Communication on Reinforcing the OMC⁶ and in successive Joint Reports. We would also highlight, as well as the Peer Reviews quoted, the specific PROGRESS projects – for example LAPS and RAPs⁷ PROGRESS project.

The project "Towards Social Inclusion ¡IntegrACTÚA!", funded under the Progress Budget-Line, has proved to be the most structured framework for disseminating Social Inclusion Regional and Local Plans. EAPN, the Luis Vives Foundation and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces have led this two-year campaign with two-fold aims. The first one is to strengthen social inclusion policies in Spain, especially at the local level including through participative forums. The second aim is to inform and sensitize the different social sectors and citizens about the current figures on poverty and social exclusion and how to

⁶ EC Communication: Reinforcing the OMC (July 2008).

⁷ Developing a Methodological Framework for Developing Local and Regional Plans for Social Inclusion – LAPS and RAPs Project financed through Progress (Jan 2007).

combat them. The project's [website](#) offers detailed information on the Social OMC, including Regional and Local Action Plans at the European, national, regional and local level.

New Opportunities and Threats

- *Decentralization/territorial focus v centralization*

The increasing pressure for decentralization of services/budget control to autonomous regions in many Member States appeared to be encouraging new opportunities for promoting a positive environment for the development of RAPs and LAPs. This positive opportunity is underlined by the positive reception given to the Barca report which gives priority to a space-based/territorial development process. However, in the current EU climate, racked with the pressures of solving public deficits caused by the crisis and bailing out the banking system, the political backing to further develop LAPs and RAPs is in reality being seriously undermined.
- *Crisis impact*

The impact of the crisis is leading to a greater centralization of decision-making, emphasizing the role of national government and EU governance in controlling public debt and deficits. This is confirmed in the new Europe 2020 strategy⁸ which focuses on Member States - with little reference to the regional and local level, or actors, or the need for RAPs and LAPs. Europe 2020 backs an essentially top-down process, calling on Member States to develop National Reform Programmes setting out national goals and priorities in line with agreed EU priorities with budget strings attached through Structural Funds. Whilst the new Integrated Guidelines make a specific reference to the need to engage all relevant stakeholders including civil society in the development, implementation and review of the National Reform Programmes⁹, in reality there is little culture or experience of stakeholder engagement, in the NRP process, or the Employment Strategy, beyond the positive examples in the Social OMC. Few MS are currently engaging stakeholders at a national level, in any kind of debate on the targets or the NRPs.
- *Europe 2020 and the 'transformation of the Social OMC'*

For the first time, Europe 2020 will have a specific social dimension, with an agreed poverty target delivered through a specific Guideline 10 on poverty and social exclusion. A specific social contribution will therefore be made to the national reports. However, the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and National Strategic Report process involving relevant stakeholders remain vital both to ensure both the broader, integrated and multidimensional content, including the three pillars of the Social OMC as well ensuring an active stakeholder involvement. There is currently a risk that this core element of the Social OMC, which is now be linked to the new Europe 2020 Flagship Platform against Poverty, (due to be published in December 2010), will lose a specific National Action Planning and Strategic Report process, undermining any further development in regional and local action plans.

⁸ EC Communication: Europe 2020, delivering on smart, sustainable, inclusive growth. (EC March 2010).

⁹ Recital 16, Integrated Guidelines for Europe 2020.

4. Key Questions for the debate

1. How to get the balance between top-down and bottom-up? What elements are necessary to promote an active governance process which “thinks outside the box” on causes, results and proposing solutions?
2. How far does the local action planning process deliver concrete results for local people? What types/methods of evaluation need to be implemented, ex-ante and ex-post, to ensure satisfaction for different stakeholders, including users and to monitor impact and results?
3. How important is it to clarify the scope of local/regional and national competences (and EU) and budget limitations? What is the mainstreaming process? Is it not essential to link LAPs to participative budgeting?
4. What new tools and instruments are being developed to ensure the effective and sustainable engagement of people experiencing poverty and NGOs that support them? Are these adequately resourced?
5. How far is the current political context (EU and National) supporting or undermining the development of LAPs and RAPs? What actions could be taken by national actors to strengthen this environment?

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