

Submission to the 'New Targeting Social Need' Phase 2 Consultation

ANTI POVERTY

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From the Communities in Transition Programme,

Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Introduction

The Communities in Transition Programme, managed by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, commenced in 2002. It has focused on community development, capacity building and peacebuilding in ten local areas where the issue of weak community infrastructure is compounded by community tensions and divisions. In addition, the Supporting Transition Initiative strand of the Communities in Transition Programme focuses on addressing peacebuilding, social inclusion, capacity building and weak community infrastructure issues within twelve further 'communities of interest'. This submission to the 'New Targeting Social Need' consultation highlights issues of social need relating to areas of weak community infrastructure and community tension. The submission is based on comments made by staff working on the Communities in Transition Programme.

Defining 'Poverty' and 'Social Exclusion'

The Communities in Transition Programme welcomes the new NI Anti-Poverty Strategy, but acknowledges that the current strategic aim is aspirational in nature and needs to be grounded in a 'relative' context. It will require measurable outcomes, agreed baselines and clear definitions of 'poverty' and 'social exclusion'. Wide variations in the definition of 'Social Need' across Government Departments under New TSN have made it extremely difficult to measure progress. This will happen again if 'poverty' and 'social exclusion' are not clearly defined. The discussion in the document on the definition and measurements of 'poverty', including relative and absolute income measures and consensual, correlative and subjective material deprivation measures, need to be incorporated not only into a definition of 'poverty' that can be agreed across Departments and programmes, but also in measures of poverty for effective monitoring of the Strategy. This is not well represented in the list of indicators used for the New TSN Evaluation (Annex 5). The indicators presented provide a means by which baseline data can be collected and measured at the group- /area-based level, yet they only partially define poverty (even in its most financial and material sense) and they do not apply at the individual level. The addition of consensual poverty data from the "Bare Necessities" report or from similar research, such as the method used in the Combat Poverty Agency's recent report on the Republic of Ireland – "Mapping Poverty", forms a more complete definition of financial/material poverty; however, this data would have to be repeatedly collected and the definition of consensual poverty continually refined. While it can be costly to carry out

primary research into consensual and subjective measures of deprivation it is critical that the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy has the potential to be monitored against such indicators. An agreed baseline with targets, measurable outputs and integrated, strategic outcomes must be firmly established from the outset under the new NI Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Furthermore, the definitions of 'poverty and social exclusion' need to be widened to incorporate more than financial and material poverty. While financial and material poverty can often prohibit social inclusion, they are not the only factors which can have such an effect. Isolation, high levels of crime, discrimination, poor health (physical and mental) and poor standards of health care, a lack of education and educational opportunities and a lack of support structures are all factors which can contribute to social exclusion, arguably to the same extent as financial and material poverty. Many of these factors are mentioned in the definition of 'social exclusion' presented in Section 2.12; however, Figure 2 (page 54 of the Consultation Document) and Figure 3 (page 59) present a model for "Improving Income and Living Conditions of the Most Disadvantaged". The three tiers targeted and the three strategic priority areas (Building Capacity, Creating Employment Opportunities and Tackling Financial Hardship) are all critical to the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy. However, the addition of a fourth strategic aim, Promoting Social Inclusion/Tackling Social Exclusion is also necessary in order to fully improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged. Furthermore, the continuation of the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative is critical, along with the further development of "a new PSI group to develop a strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion experienced by lone parents" (page 54). This would mean the full list of PSI groups would be: older people, people with disabilities, homeless people and lone parents. Additional categories of vulnerable groups are listed throughout section 1 of the document (e.g. ethnic minorities) and these groups all need recognition and a specific focus within the Promoting Social Inclusion initiative.

Measuring and Monitoring Disadvantage

Measurements of disadvantage and the identification of the three target groups (Individuals, Areas and Communities, Vulnerable Groups) need to be improved. If the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy aims to focus primarily on the most disadvantaged groups, communities and individuals, there needs to be a robust, transparent mechanism for determining who fits into this category. Identification of the most disadvantaged individuals will prove even more complicated than identification of geographic communities, but certainly should not rely upon geographic-based data (i.e. Residence in an area/ward/Super Output Area which is considered to be one of the most disadvantaged must not be a criteria for determining levels of individual disadvantage.) The formulation of agreed financial exclusion targets at the inception of the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy should help to identify the individuals considered to be 'most disadvantaged' in order to set targets and outcome indicators across Government Departments and within the Northern Ireland Regional Action Plan. Finally, the selection of vulnerable groups/communities of interest to be prioritised by the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy must objectively

show why these particular groups were considered to be the most disadvantaged. While it may be easier to select specific vulnerable groups than it is to select geographic communities or individuals, it is more difficult to measure progress against targets for these groups without conducting new primary research. Clear data exists in relation to the social exclusion and financial/material poverty of many lone parent families, for example, but this data is not so readily available for other communities of interest as it should be.

The Communities in Transition Programme has been involved in carrying out original research on the development and application of new indicators of social capital¹ and this research is ongoing. The Programme is using social capital indicators as its main evaluative tool at the local level. There is a clear need for measurements of social capital to be built into the set of indicators adopted by the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy, for use in agreeing a baseline position, targeting area-based communities, individuals and 'communities of interest' and measuring long-term progress.

Regional Poverty Action Plan for Northern Ireland

A Regional Poverty Action Plan for Northern Ireland, consistent with the Common Outline for EU National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion, is a useful means of setting the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy in a European context. In general, the Communities in Transition Programme supports the proposed format. However, the three strategic priorities underpinning this proposed format need to be broadened to include specific priorities tackling *social* exclusion.

Resources

There is a need for the 'skewing' approach to budgets and resources; however, there must also be an acknowledgment that more resources are necessary. Through the development of inter-departmental and inter-sectoral strategies, a 'top-slicing' approach for the development of a central pool of funds should also be pursued, so that each department has a dedicated percentage contribution. This will further enable all departments to identify individually and *in toto* the amount of public expenditure relevant to the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy, unlike under New TSN where this was not identified.

¹ Morrissey, M. *Research to Identify Key Indicators to Measure Social Capital in Neighbourhoods* (2004) and Morrissey, Healy, Harbison and McDonnell *Mapping Social Capital: A Model for Investment* (Forthcoming).

Anti-Poverty Forum

Accountability to a Ministerial group is essential to the success of the NI Anti-Poverty Strategy and this should help to resolve some of the issues mentioned above in relation to unclear and differing definitions, targets and measurements of poverty across different departments and different sectors. The inter-departmental and inter-sectoral approach is also welcome; however, there should be greater emphasis on the community sector at the Forum level and a greater emphasis on the locally based community development partnership approach to ensure local accountability. Local communities/community organisations and organisations representing particular communities of interest should be involved **from the outset** in planning, prioritising and working to deliver actions that they feel best represent the needs of the areas/groups to which they belong.