DEVELOPING A
LOCAL ANTI-POVERTY
AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
STRATEGY: A GUIDE

Combat Poverty Agency *working for a poverty-free Ireland*

20th Anniversary
1986 – 2006

BACKGROUND

The EU member states, including Ireland, recognise that poverty and social exclusion are critical issues they must tackle. In 1997 the Irish Government, in consultation with the social partners, community and voluntary sector and other stakeholders, launched a wide-ranging plan to tackle poverty and its causes, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). The NAPS set out a series of anti-poverty and social inclusion targets grouped under a number of themes such as housing and employment. These targets were updated when the NAPS was revised in 2000.

From 2003 NAPS has been incorporated into the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion) and national partnership agreements with the social partners.

The revised NAPS, *Building an Inclusive Society* 2002, recognised that local authorities have an important role to play in supporting and implementing these national strategies at local level and extended the NAPS to all local government policies and actions.

The new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007-2016) also highlights the role of local authorities in tackling poverty.

NAPinclusion affirms the role of the County/City Development Boards (CDBs) as the key co-ordinating mechanism for public service delivery at local level, including joined up delivery of social inclusion programmes. Social Inclusion Units will be extended to half of all city and county councils by the end of 2008 in line with this approach.

How can a local authority reduce poverty and exclusion?

Many local authority functions affect the welfare and quality of life of disadvantaged people and communities. Local authorities can improve the situation of the disadvantaged by:

- Delivering effective and accessible public services such as housing
- Involving the local community in developing policy for key functions such as housing, roads and planning, to ensure the impacts those policies will have on the most disadvantaged people are taken into account
- Specifically considering the needs of vulnerable groups when drawing up and carrying out City/County Development Plans and other strategic and operational plans.

Why is a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy important?

To be most effective in tackling local poverty and disadvantage, a local authority, through the County/City Development Board (CDB) framework should co-ordinate all its activities and those of other CDB members/ agencies, into one integrated, targeted strategy – a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy (LAPSIS).

A Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy actively contributes to the success of the national anti-poverty targets of the NAPinclusion and is part of a wider drive across the EU to make a decisive impact on eradicating poverty and social exclusion. The ultimate aim is to improve the lives of people who are worst off in society.

What is a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy?

A Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy is a programme of work that involves:

- Data collection to identify poverty and social exclusion in a local area
- Integrated local actions to tackle poverty and social exclusion in that area
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of the actions developed from plans
- Communicating and promoting those plans and actions among different internal or local stakeholders.

Combat Poverty Agency

The Combat Poverty Agency is the statutory public body working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion. It supports local authorities in tackling local poverty and marginalisation through a number of supports and resources. These include:

- The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (LGAPLN) to help local authorities develop their awareness and capacity for anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies (Since 2006 the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) has taken over the LGAPLN meetings)
- The publication of *Developing a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy: A Guide.*

This brochure set out all the steps for drawing up, carrying out and monitoring a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy.

Things to consider when starting out:

Stages of a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

To draw up a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy you need to:

- Set clear aims and break these down into specific targets to be achieved within a set time
- Carry out a poverty profile to map the current poverty situation and what groups most need support

- Audit the existing anti-poverty work being carried out and the staff skills and training needs
- Train staff, partner agencies and other players, especially those who represent target communities and groups working against poverty
- Set targets. Do this by expressing Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy aims as specific changes needed in policy, services, attitudes to poverty, work practices, training outputs and the effects you want these to have on the local area
- Set indicators that will define the changes you want as figures that can be measured, such as 'provide 50 extra houses' or 'hold three training sessions'
- Set these indicators across a range of services
- Estimate and line up the resources you will need to carry out a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy effectively
- Consult people who are going to be affected
- Poverty Impact Assess (PIA) policies and services for how they affect people in poverty
- Carry out the Strategy
- Invite a peer group from another CDB area to review ongoing activity to see what is working well towards achieving the targets and what needs to be improved
- Monitor and evaluate Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy actions and their outcomes
- Based on evaluation, review the strategy, change what's necessary and carry on to the next stage of work.

Community Development Principles

In community development, the 'process' – how you do things – is as important as the 'product' – what you do. Be guided by community development principles in your Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy.

- Focus on disadvantaged people and communities
- Enable and empower people who are disadvantaged to participate in issues, decisions and strategies that affect them
- Consult with a wide group of people, especially those who are likely to be affected by the council's actions
- Emphasise participation, openness and inclusion in doing your business.

How to get started

- Pick a leader and Steering Group who will be best placed to lead and drive the LAPSIS

  - Select a Steering Group that will draw together all the council function areas and outside agencies needed to co-ordinate and carry out the LAPSIS. It should include the city/county manager, senior management, elected representatives, key departments and groups and agencies outside the council, including people who directly experience poverty and/or their representative organisations.
  - The Steering Group will help develop the Vision, set the Aims and define the Methods for developing the LAPSIS and work towards achieving the aims.
  - The Steering Group will decide clearly members' roles and responsibilities and plan for time, resources, procedures, supports and training.

- Plan and provide resources to allow a wide group of people to be consulted and enabled to participate in a meaningful way
- Communicate the aims and strategy to stakeholders and the wider public. Explain clearly the scope and limits of consultation, what is its purpose and what you hope it can deliver
- Consider how you will deal with disagreements that may arise during consultation and planning. Plan what consensus-building and facilitation tools you could use to resolve these.

Putting resources in place

You must plan for the time, skills, training, physical facilities, information and money needed to carry out the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy. Intangible but important resources like trust, goodwill, creativity, networking contacts and staff knowledge need to be included.

Resources needed

People inside the organisation and external stakeholders, to carry out the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

Skills already in place and new skills to meet new needs

Time for training, raising awareness of poverty and consulting with marginalised groups who are traditionally excluded from this process

Training for staff on poverty awareness and in specific skills such as consultation techniques, strategic planning, community development and user-friendly communication

Information on poverty and social exclusion, sourced both within the council and from other organisations

Physical facilities such as meeting places for planning and implementing the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, and for staff when dealing with clients and service users in the public area

Money which can be a challenge with limited budgets. Administrative, training and consultation expenses need to be met. It may be possible to ring-fence funds from different budgets to help put the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy into effect. For example, could money from the roads or planning budgets be used to fund community consultation on these function areas? Explore how to find external funding, perhaps in partnership with community groups.

Training

Training is vital for staff, elected representatives, outside stakeholders and particularly for people from target communities or their representatives. Everyone needs to understand the importance of the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy, the major facts on poverty and social exclusion and the role of civil society. Some staff may need specialist or technical training, for example, on how to do a Poverty Profile; how to carry out a Poverty Impact Assessment; or Consultation and Participation.

At the end, evaluate the training and see if it achieved what was intended.

Carrying out a poverty profile

You will need to profile the nature and extent of poverty in your area to help identify local poverty issues and the gaps between needs and services. A poverty profile involves collecting good quality information on local poverty from reliable sources, backed up by information and experience from within the agencies and the community.

The information needs to be grouped under headings or policy themes such as housing, transport or health. Indicators such as numbers or per centages are needed to show the extent of a problem. The data needs to relate to a specific area, so that the poverty situation can be mapped. It needs to be put into a measurable, IT-friendly format.

When presenting the completed poverty profile, describe the theme (housing); the indicator (percentage of homeless); the area; the source of the data; key issues and trends; and any gaps in information.

With a clear picture of local needs, resources can be targeted in the most effective way and monitored to see if they are achieving what is intended. Analysing the data may require special training for staff or outside help.

Social inclusion indicators

An indicator is a figure that shows the existence or severity of a particular situation, for example, '40 per cent of people on the housing list need two-bedroom houses'.

Eight key social inclusion indicators were identified for use by local authorities to ensure that social inclusion was embedded across all council procedures and activities. *(Developing a Local Anti-Poverty Strategy: A Guide,* Combat Poverty Agency (2005))

These are:

Local authority housing unit starts

Social housing

Catering for vulnerable road users

Part V social and affordable housing units

Poverty/equality/diversity training

Production of key forms in user-friendly formats

Priority given to social inclusion

Customer surveys

Local authorities and agencies are encouraged to develop their own local social inclusion indicators.

Drafting a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

A Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy is about using resources strategically and effectively to make a difference on poverty and social exclusion. To do this, targets need to be set for all of the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy themes. To set targets you need to know where you are now, through a local poverty profile, and what you want your strategy to achieve. Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy targets must reflect what is in the NAPinclusion.

Targets are set for:

Inputs   –   the resources you will make available
Outputs   –   changes in your products or services
Outcomes –   the impact these changes have and how they will improve the quality of people's lives.

Targets should be relevant; meaningful; achievable; should challenge the council to better its services; be easily understood; be clear how they are to be achieved and who is responsible; be time-based; and capable of being tracked.

The targets should reflect the needs of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, elected representatives, council staff and other groups in the community.

They should be set with input from people who experience poverty; front-line staff; managers who will have to organise resources; elected representatives who are accountable to the public; and people with experience of anti-poverty work.

When setting targets, a performance indicator, which sets out the quality of performance that you want to achieve in meeting the targets, and the indicators to measure progress on social inclusion, should be set also. The Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy will draw all these elements together.

The Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy and its targets should be built into all the strategic, corporate and operational plans through the City and County Development Board structure. The targets or strategic plans of other local organisations and agencies, especially those in the CDB structure, should reflect the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy targets and work in tandem to achieve its goals.

Poverty Impact Assessment (PIA)
The aim of poverty impact assessment is to identify the effect of policy proposals on poor people so that this can be given proper consideration when designing and carrying through policy.

Policies are tested at design, review and implementation stages to assess:

- The impact a policy or action has on people living with poverty
- What improvements need to be made to better the situation of people experiencing poverty.

When carrying out a poverty impact assessment on policies, staff should focus on producing the best possible result for people in or at risk of poverty.

Policies - even those that may seem to have no apparent effect on poverty - may require a poverty impact assessment.

Poverty Impact Assessment Stages

Stage 1 Screening:

Screen policies to decide their significance to people experiencing poverty. Policies that are significant should go to stage 2.

Stage 2 Poverty Impact Assessment:

Assess what impact policies will have on anti-poverty and social inclusion targets. Adjust policies where needed and agree a time frame and monitoring procedures. As part of the monitoring process determine the actual impact policies have had and how this compares with the intended impact. It may be necessary to re-adjust policies as necessary.

All service areas must build poverty impact assessment into their mainstream planning, including County Development Plans, County Development Strategies, Corporate Plans, Annual Operational Plans and service plans.

Implementing the strategy

An action plan is needed to implement the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy. To draw up the action plan, set down all the information, resources, skills and experience needed.

Divide this into 'What We Already Have' and 'What We Need to Put in Place'. Do this for all targets across all the LAPSIS themes, such as housing, training, consultation etc.

Draw up a list of tasks. Decide who or what department/ agency is responsible for doing them, how long they will take, and when they are to be started and completed. This is the action plan.

Complete all the tasks in the time planned for. Monitor the actions to ensure everything is going ahead as planned. Revise the actions if necessary. At the end, examine what has been done and what, if anything, remains to be done. Check against the targets and performance indicators to see if the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy achieved the aims and reached the standards desired.

Ask what worked well and what needs to be improved in order to meet the targets. Revise the strategy. Set targets and goals for the next time period and carry on to the next stage.

Communicating the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy

Planning for communication is an integral part of a LAPSIS. Communication needs to be internal, external and collegiate.

Internal: A clear message of the strategic aims and the importance of the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy in the agency's work must reach all staff.

External: You must consult and work with the people whose lives are affected by the policies and actions being developed.

Collegiate: You need to explain the strategy to partner organisations or stakeholders and align their work with that of the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy.

Set up a communications group to draw up the communications strategy; consult with other stakeholders; implement the different strands of communication and evaluate and review what has been done.

The group should plan how to communicate with different audiences. It should:
- Tailor communications to the target group
- Know what stage of the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy the communication is dealing with
- Decide which of the many methods of communication – spoken, electronic, written or face to face – best suits the situation.
- Decide which method will be used: a press release, advertisement, seminar, training handbook etc.

In doing this work a database of media and other contacts should be compiled and updated regularly.

Carrying out a peer review

To find out if a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy is working well in meeting the targets or if actions need to be changed, a local authority can invite a peer review of its activity by a peer review group from another CDB area.

The peer review group will agree with you what themes or areas of work you want reviewed and will work closely with you in carrying out the review. It will consult with the stakeholders, especially community and voluntary groups working against poverty. It will compare what you are doing and how you do it against agreed targets of good practice on social inclusion. The review group will report its findings to you in a constructive, supportive way.

A peer review is a critical way of ensuring the Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy continually adopts good practice and achieves the highest standard of success. Based on the peer review findings, a Local Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy can be revised or improved so that it is most likely to get the best possible results.

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