

recognition of  
the inherent  
dignity and of  
the equal and  
inalienable  
rights of all  
members of  
the human  
family is the  
foundation of  
freedom, justice  
and peace in  
the world



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

# USING RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES TO TACKLE POVERTY

Funded Initiatives 2005

# Background

Combat Poverty Agency believes that tackling poverty involves the recognition of economic, social and cultural rights, the eradication of discrimination and respect for diversity. It has further argued that active citizenship and the right to participate is central to accessing other rights for disadvantaged groups and communities.

The United Nations has affirmed the link between poverty and human rights and has called for a human rights approach to poverty reduction, an approach that requires active and informed participation by people living in poverty in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies.

In 2002 this approach was reflected in the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy, *Building an Inclusive Society*, which states that 'Citizenship rights encompass not only the core civil and political rights and obligations but also social, economic and cultural rights and obligations that underpin equality of opportunity and policies on access to education, employment, health, housing and social services.'

In 2005 Combat Poverty Agency developed a funding initiative to support community development and anti-poverty groups to organise activities that would promote awareness of how a rights-based approach can contribute to tackling poverty. The purpose of this funding was:

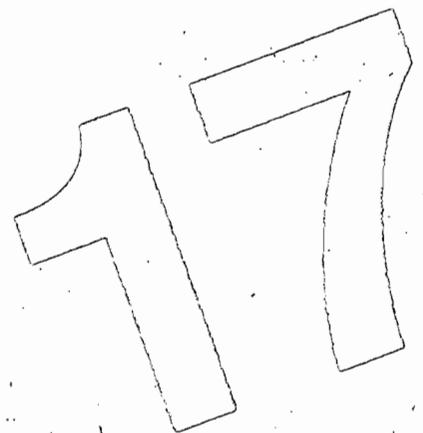
- To develop the capacity of anti-poverty and community development groups to understand international rights instruments (such as treaties and covenants) and standards and make links with their work
- To create an understanding of a rights-based approach to tackling poverty in the context of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/incl)
- To develop an understanding of how a focus on rights can complement other strategies and approaches to tackling poverty.

In 2005 seventeen initiatives were funded for a one-year period. This brochure contains a brief description and initial contact details of the funded Initiatives.

## **For further information contact:**

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## **An effective tool for carers' groups**

(Care Alliance Ireland)

Care Alliance Ireland brings voluntary groups together to support family carers and to develop more effective policies and services for them.

Through an international literature review, the organisation examined how groups in other countries had used a rights-based approach in supporting family carers. The review was undertaken in order to identify approaches that might be effective for similar groups in Ireland. The review findings were presented at a seminar to a wide range of non-governmental family support groups. The aim of the presentation was to promote awareness of this approach as an effective advocacy tool. The report was also distributed electronically.

Care Alliance Ireland organised a second seminar, aimed this time at developing the capacity of groups to use a rights-based approach to further their aims. During this seminar participants examined how such an approach could support their work, and how it might be promoted at policy level.

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## **Highlight key rights in user-friendly format**

(Inner City Organisations Network – ICON)

The Inner City Organisations Network (ICON) is involved in the Participation and Practice of Rights project, a north-south coalition of groups developing a model of a rights-based approach to basic services among marginalised communities.

ICON decided to raise awareness among residents of Dublin's north inner city, especially local authority tenants, of their social and economic rights. It aimed to highlight key rights, both national and international, relating to employment, education, community development, welfare law and, particularly, housing and health. It also aimed to identify the key agencies that residents could contact to ensure that their rights were met.

The project was carried out in partnership with the North West Inner City Network. A researcher collated the information, which was published in a user-friendly format. This was distributed to the 3,800 residents of flat complexes in the two areas and promoted through a media launch. ICON and the North West Inner City Network continued to act as advocates with agencies for people seeking to secure their rights.

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## **Right to sexual health and family planning services**

(Irish Family Planning Association)

In 1994 the Government signed the International Convention on Population and Development, which committed it to improving access to sexual health and family planning services, particularly for socially excluded women. The Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) worked with residents and community groups in RAPID areas in Tallaght and Clondalkin to examine how a rights-based approach might be used to ensure access to sexual health services and to improve those services locally.

The project sought to empower activists to advocate for sexual health services by informing them about international conventions that guaranteed sexual and reproductive rights, and about sexual health services available in other areas. This was done through an information seminar held in May, which put local needs into the wider context of internationally recognised rights.

The IFPA hopes this information will lead to a better understanding of sexual and reproductive rights and increased advocacy for services. A report of the seminar was circulated to area partnerships, CDPs, RAPID co-ordinators, the HSE and the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

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## **Rights-based training for African community activists**

(Africa Centre and AKIDWA)

The Africa Centre works with African immigrants throughout Ireland to promote their participation through providing information, training, networking opportunities and advocacy on their behalf. In 2005 the centre adopted a civil and human rights perspective as a core value in its strategic plan.

The Africa Centre, in partnership with AKIDWA, the African Women's Network, was funded to run four facilitated training sessions, introducing the concept of a rights-based approach to community activists. The training covered topics on national and international human rights law in accessible, everyday language.

Two sessions gave background information on human and legal rights, and two further sessions examined how these rights might be used in practice. Approximately 20 men and women from around the country took part and travel expenses were funded. The centre aimed to follow this with further projects on human rights.

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## **Rights for tenants and people suffering abuse**

(O'Devaney Gardens Development Forum)

In 1998 local women undertook a needs survey to address the absence of community facilities in O'Devaney Gardens. A community centre and facilities for young children were seen as priorities and funding was secured for a community centre. In addition, the survey and community feedback highlighted the need for information on rights for people affected by domestic violence and sexual abuse.

In 2001 the area was selected for regeneration, a process that will see a doubling of the population. O'Devaney Gardens Development Forum was established to ensure that people's rights and wishes were respected in the regeneration programme and that proper community and recreation facilities would be provided.

The Development Forum worked with a city-wide Tenants First network in organising a workshop on tenants' rights in the regeneration programme and its aftermath, e.g. rights to purchase homes and future maintenance. Additionally, the Forum researched legal rights and supports for people experiencing domestic violence and sexual abuse. This information was then explained through workshops and information leaflets.

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## **Employment rights and law for migrant workers**

(Wicklow Trade Union Centre for the Unemployed)

In 2005 Wicklow Trade Union Centre for the Unemployed (WTUC) organised a number of seminars with migrant workers to inform them of their legal rights and employment law. The seminars revealed a need for a more detailed booklet on rights and entitlements for migrant workers. This booklet was prepared and published.

The 2006 Budget introduced certain changes in employment law, and WTUC decided to produce a leaflet, called 'Knowledge is Power', with updated information on employment rights. Information on employment rights and law was gathered and then submitted to an expert on employment law for assessment.

Following this process, the material was translated into Polish, and distributed to Wicklow's large Polish population. It could then be sent to people planning to come to Ireland.

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## **Accessible information for one-parent families**

(One Family)

One Family provides voice, support and action for people living in one-parent families. It runs programmes for those parenting alone, lobbies on relevant policy, and provides training for solo parents and for those working with them. Part of its structure is the can\* campaigning and advocacy network, which is made up of individual one-parent families and service providers.

One Family, using an experienced consultant, produced an accessible booklet for can\* members and other interested groups. This booklet set down the main international human rights conventions and spelt out how they could be used in anti-poverty work and related lobbying. The booklet explored relevant human rights articles under the conventions and their possible use in an Irish context. It also suggested steps that local one-parent family groups might take to incorporate a rights-based approach in their work.

The booklet was launched publicly and distributed to some 1,000 members of can\* while a further 1,000 were circulated among other groups. One Family plans to follow up the booklet with training to strengthen the rights-based activity of its members.

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## **Training for trainers in using rights covenants**

(Women's Human Rights Alliance)

Women's Human Rights Alliance (WHRA) promotes a feminist women's human rights analysis, monitors implementation of human rights treaties and builds the capacity of women's groups and organisations to hold the Government accountable on international human rights agreements it has ratified.

Through a training programme WHRA aimed to provide participants with a better understanding of economic, social and cultural rights and to equip them with the skills to promote and defend such rights. Participants on the training programme were drawn from local, regional and national groups. The five-day training was run in partnership with the Irish Human Rights Commission and in association with Dignity International, an NGO operating from Strasbourg that runs rights training for grassroots organisations around the world.

The training focused on the theory and practice of working from a feminist human rights-based approach and how to apply economic, social and cultural rights to combat women's poverty. It assisted participants in planning practical actions to transfer the learning back to their own organisations and communities. A training resource pack was made available to the participants and the WHRA offered follow-up support.

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## **Linking women's personal lives with politics**

(Donegal Women's Network)

Donegal Women's Network is a countrywide organisation to which many women's groups and individuals are affiliated. It supports women's groups to act collectively to improve the quality of life for women in Donegal, and to understand the links between their personal circumstances and the social, political and decision-making structures that affect women's lives.

The network emphasises the importance of economic rights for women within the context of global rights conventions such as the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the United Nations International Convention on Women's Human Rights. Donegal has twice the national level of poverty and linking women's life experiences to politics presents their poverty as a violation of rights.

The Network ran three facilitated workshops on gender, economic and cultural rights to help members explore the relevance of global rights to their lives and how their own actions could help to bring about change. Approximately 20 participants explored the genesis of women's rights and gender rights; what was meant by rights, based on international conventions and women's own experiences; and finally, how human rights instruments could be integrated in women's lobbying and campaigning work.

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## **The law and social welfare reform**

(National Women's Council of Ireland)

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) is the national representative organisation of women. It works to promote equality for women in every strand of civil, economic and social life. It has campaigned for reforms to the social welfare system that would ensure equal treatment for women through recognition of care work and

parenting by the system; improving women's access to independent pensions; facilitating atypical forms of work; and increasing women's economic independence.

NWCI organised a seminar to examine the Irish social welfare system from a women's rights perspective and explore the potential that exists in national, EU and international law to reform the social welfare system and make it more equitable for women. NWCI members and individuals and organisations involved in the NWCI's social welfare reform campaign attended, as well as representatives from national organisations and decision makers.

An advisory group of experts in women's human rights, EU and national law helped plan the seminar and prepared an initial analysis of the inequalities in the social welfare system from a women's human rights and legal perspective. This was presented to the seminar and subsequent discussion explored what legal mechanisms might be useful to the welfare reform campaign. A report of the seminar was produced and the expert group met later to assess the potential of various courses of action.

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## **Researching right to a basic income**

(Northside Community Law Centre)

Northside Community Law Centre is an independent community-based legal centre that provides free legal advice, information and support to people on the north side of Dublin city. In addition, the Law Centre works to empower the community through education, research and campaigns.

The centre received funding to prepare a research paper on a rights-based approach to social welfare income under which everybody would have a right to a basic income. It examined and compared the current situation in Ireland and other jurisdictions and suggested a legal strategy to bring such a right into operation.

The paper was launched at a seminar for the local community, policymakers and members of the legal profession. It was followed by a campaign to raise awareness among the legal and local community.

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## **Community and family response to drugs**

(Ballymun Youth Action Project)

Ballymun Youth Action Project (BYAP) was set up in 1981 as a community response to addiction. Since 1994, BYAP has delivered the Community Addiction Studies Course (CASC) at a national level.

A conference entitled 'Poverty, Drug Use and Human Rights – Coming Together in Communities' explored what, if any, were the rights of families and communities responding to drug use and the social and economic circumstances that underlie such use. It sought to clarify if families or communities could argue a case in law around these issues, for example to seek essential family supports or social facilities in disadvantaged areas as a right. It also examined how communities might be able to argue their case and what further help a rights-based approach could give them.

The conference was mainly for CASC participants and others involved in community responses who will feed the findings into local and national structures.

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## **Rights resource for community-based groups**

(Bray Partnership Company)

Bray Partnership Company wanted to equip local target communities such as older people, people with disabilities and the economically disadvantaged with an awareness of international and EU human rights measures, and of the obligations of the Irish Government to implement them. This would give local groups a tool to explore issues of poverty and disadvantage and to advocate for their particular target populations.

In partnership with the group 80:20 Educating and Acting for a Better World and with representatives of local community-based groups, including young people, Bray Partnership developed an accessible and flexible education resource to enable groups to explore and discuss a human rights perspective on issues and use this approach to identify priorities for inclusion in the Wicklow County Local Anti-Poverty Strategy (LAPS).

The module was structured around three steps – exploring participants' ideas on human rights; stimulating their thinking; and examining rights and responsibilities. Through helping to develop the module, people were trained in its content and on how to deliver it. It was then presented to various groups in the Bray area. Participants of these workshops then took part in a seminar to feed into the LAPS process, with support from Bray Partnership. 80:20, Educating and Acting for a Better World will focus on presenting the information to younger people in local schools.

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## **Campaigning against racial discrimination**

(NGO Alliance)

NGO Alliance, a grouping of over 40 independent non-governmental organisations working on issues of anti-racism, community development and human rights, came together as a response to the 2001 World Conference Against Racism held in Durban. They wished to contribute to the process of developing a National Action Plan against Racism in Ireland and the prevention of racial discrimination. The Alliance made a submission to the Government on the implementation of its commitments following the world conference.

In 2000 Ireland ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) which is the oldest UN human rights convention. After ratification, Ireland submitted its first report to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and was then examined by the committee in 2005. NGO Alliance produced a shadow report for CERD based on a consultation process it had organised.

The Alliance also met the CERD committee in Geneva, before the Irish Government's report, to highlight issues of concern and some of these were reflected in the CERD observations. With support from Combat Poverty, the Alliance hosted a seminar to discuss the recommendations from CERD, as part of its ongoing activity.

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## **Information on training and entitlements for African women**

(Louth African Women's Support Group)

Louth African Women's Support Group was set up in 2000 by two African women to give newly-arrived African women a chance to socialise and to inform them of their entitlements. It also works voluntarily with local hospital midwives who treat African women during childbirth and with local community development projects.

Relatively few African women knew about the group and it was funded to hold a seminar both to raise awareness of its own activities and information services, and to

discuss training, employment and welfare entitlements with African women. Approximately 50 women attended the seminar.

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Louth African Women's Support Group

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## **Training refugee, asylum seeker and migrant support groups**

(Refugee Information Service)

The Refugee Information Service is an NGO, supported by Comhairle and other funders to provide information services to the refugee and asylum-seeking community. It runs several outreach clinics, often in collaboration with citizens' information centres, in areas of Dublin and the West.

It ran a number of regional workshops to discuss the rights and entitlements of people who were, or had been at some time, in the asylum-seeking process, with particular emphasis on providing practical information on accessing employment. The workshops were organised in partnership with local asylum-seeker support groups and were intended to build their capacity to provide accurate information to their clients.

The seminars first provided input on international legal instruments such as the Geneva Convention and the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, emphasising their potential to support people in the asylum-seeking process in Ireland. The participants then discussed key topics, using specific case studies as practical examples.

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## **Training people to research their rights**

(Community Technical Aid)

Community Technical Aid is a Dublin-based community organisation that offers technical support and training to community groups around the country, with a particular emphasis on urban planning and regeneration, research and policy work. It runs training programmes in various skills but all focused on empowering communities to participate in different consultative and policy arenas that would affect their well-being and quality of life.

In earlier work the organisation had developed a pilot training course on equality and rights. It identified two groups, new migrant communities and lone-parent women in local authority urban complexes, where there was a need for training in rights awareness.

It organised two training programmes, one for women in Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, where the group was predominantly made up of African women, and one for women living in O'Devaney Gardens, a local authority complex in north Dublin city that was about to be refurbished.

Both courses provided training in research skills. Participants researched areas of interest to them and their lives and used the outcomes to forward their rights. Community Technical Aid then helped them produce and distribute reports on their researches.

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