Communities, Voices and Change

A report on the policy work of CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships

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

Siobhán Airey

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**Siobhán Airey for
Combat Poverty Agency
October 2006**

"The thing about democracy, beloveds, is that it is not neat, orderly or quiet. It requires a certain relish for confusion."

Molly Ivins. American independent political columnist.

"Willingness to adopt the best arrangements is the central test of social partnership."

National Economic and Social Council (2003)
An Investment in Quality: Services, Inclusion and Enterprise. P.177.

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Abbreviations

ACCEL	An initiative of the Department of Enterprise, Training and Employment
ADM	Area Development Management
C&E	Community & Enterprise (Director of)
CDB	City/County Development Board
CDP	Community Development Project
CLE	Comhar Leader na hEireann
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency
CPN	Community Partnerships Network
CWC	Community Worker's Co-operative
D/JELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
D/SFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network
FRC	Family Resource Centre
HSE	Health Services Executive
ILSU	Irish Leader Support Unit
ITM	Irish Traveller Movement
LEED	Local Economic and Employment Development Programme managed by the OECD.
LES	Local Employment Service
LDSIP	Local Development Social Inclusion Programme
NAC of the CDP	National Advisory Committee of the Community Development Programme
NAMHI	National Association of Mental Health Ireland
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NCCRI	National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
NCCWN	National Collective of Community Women's Networks
NGO	Non-government organisation
NTWF	National Traveller Women's Programme
NWCI	National Women's Council of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
REIIS	A European network of partnership type companies
RSS	Rural Social Scheme
SIM	Social Inclusion Measures (Committee)
SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

Preface

Under its current Strategic Plan 2005-2007, the Combat Poverty's *Having Your Say* Programme was launched in November 2005 with the aim of strengthening the policy voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty. The Combat Poverty Agency Act 1986 specifies Combat Poverty as a centre for the provision of information and training on community development as a means of overcoming poverty (Section 4.2c).

A number of national and international frameworks support people's right to influence and participate in the decisions that affect them and to have their views and experiences listened to and acted on. These include:
• United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development 1986
• EU Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) 2000
• National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/incl)
• The White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity 2000
• Towards 2016, National Agreement (2006)
• Task Force on Active Citizenship (2006)
• Reaching Out: Guidelines for Consultation by Public Bodies (Department of the Taoiseach 2006)
• EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

The overall aim of the *Having Your Say Programme* is:
>   *to strengthen the policy voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty.*

Its objectives are to :
• promote the right of people in poverty to influence and participate in public policy decisions that affect them;
• initiate or support work that enhances the policy skills and capacities of groups of people experiencing poverty, their representatives or organisations supporting them;
• work in partnership with policy-makers to increase their understanding of the issues related to, and implications of, involving people in poverty in policy making; and
• strengthen the integration of anti-poverty practice by community and voluntary organisations into the policy advice role of Combat Poverty.

Under objective two, a key action is to examine the feasibility of establishing and supporting a three-year policy-learning initiative with community-based anti-poverty initiative. The Community Development Programme (CDP), Family and Community Services Resource Centres' Programme (FRC) and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) are of particular interest.

To inform the development of a policy learning initiative two roundtables were held in March 2006 to which CDPs, FRCs, Partnerships and Programme management bodies were invited. A report of the roundtables by Maureen Bassett and Darra Power-Mooney is available from www.combatpoverty.ie/havingyoursay.

A key outcome of the consultative roundtables was the value of documenting and assessing experiences of policy engagement within the three national Programmes above and an exploration of policy learning needs and responses.

Siobhan Airey was commissioned to produce a report that investigates, maps and assesses:

• policy engagement already being undertaken by the CDPs in the Community Development Programme, FRCs in the Family and Community Services' Resource Centres Programme and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme

• policy learning supports available to groups in the three Programmes

• policy learning needs *within* and *across* the three Programmes

• gaps in policy inputs from the projects into anti-poverty policy making spaces

• possible responses to policy learning needs with identification of roles and responsibilities for stakeholders

A steering group of Combat Poverty, Pobal, the Family Support Agency, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the National Forum of Family Resource Centres, a Community Development Project and OPEN (One Parent Exchange Network) a member of the National Anti Poverty Networks, were involved in overseeing the report.

The report is presented to the second annual conference of the *Having Your Say Programme* on the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17th October 2006, for consultation on its findings and recommendations.

Following the conference it is anticipated that a number of further actions will be initiated. It is expected that these will promote the findings of the research and build on and/or complement existing initiatives that enhance the policy skills and capacities of groups of people experiencing poverty, their representatives or organisations supporting them.

The report makes a valuable contribution to the evidence-base about the experience of participation in policy related structures and process to effect social change in favour of people experiencing poverty.

Combat Poverty is pleased to acknowledge and thank both Siobhan Airey and the Steering Group for their expertise and contribution to bring the report to completion.

Combat Poverty Agency
October 2006

Section 1 | Introduction to the research

1.1   Background to the research

In November 2005, Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) launched 'Having Your Say'- a three-year programme with the overall aim 'To strengthen the policy voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty'. One of the four objectives of the programme is

To initiate and support work that enhances the policy skills and capacities of groups of people experiencing poverty, their representatives or organisations supporting them.

An identified action within these objectives was 'With relevant others, examine the feasibility of establishing and supporting a three year policy learning network for Family Resource Centres, Community Development Projects and the Local Development Programme[1]'. To inform this initiative, two consultative roundtables were held in March 2006 to which CDPs (Community Development Projects), FRCs (Family Resource Centres), LDSIP (Local Development Social Inclusion Programme). Partnerships and programme management bodies were invited. One of the outcomes of these roundtables was recognition of the value of documenting and assessing the experiences of policy engagement within the three programmes and exploring policy learning needs and possible responses.

1.2   Terms of Reference

The CPA then commissioned the production of a report that would investigate, map and assess
• Policy engagement already being undertaken by the CDPs in the Community Development Programme, FRCs in the Family and Community Services Resource Centres Programme and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme

• Policy learning supports available to groups in the three programmes
• Policy learning needs within and across the three Programmes
• Gaps in policy inputs from the projects into anti-poverty policy making spaces
• Possible responses to policy learning needs with identification of roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

The tender document for the research made a number of specifications to be addressed by the methodology. These specifications related to:

a) The sample to be selected for the mapping exercise
• the sample was to consist of 13 CDPs, seven FRCs and six area-based and/or community Partnerships – one from each county in the Republic of Ireland (26 in total).
• the sample was to address diversity considerations across the programmes
• projects selected should be active in working with other organisations

b) Level and type of policy activities
Policy engagement at local, regional, national and international levels were to be taken into account, as were the types of policy activities undertaken, including participation/representation in policy structures, policy submissions, applied research and other activities.

c) Research period and methodology
The tender also specified that the mapping exercise should cover the period of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 and build the involvement of the target stakeholders in the research methodology.

1.3   Methodology

The research methodology selected involved a number of approaches, including

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[1] This is the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme, a programme that aims to counter disadvantage and to promote equality and social and economic inclusion, managed by Pobal and delivered through area-based and community Partnerships, located around the country.

• A survey of a sample of 38 projects[2] deemed representative of the programmes as a whole and geographically spread around the country.

Consultations were held with personnel from each of the three programmes to select a representative sample from each programme that would reflect both geographic and diversity concerns. The survey was confidential and sought information on policy activities and issues where policy-focused work was undertaken; on policy mechanisms and arenas engaged with; on gaps in inputs, policy supports available and policy learning and support needs (see Appendix 4 for the questionnaire used).

•Case studies on projects in each of the three programmes with a track record of policy engagement.

The purpose of the case studies was to capture the depth and range of policy work undertaken as an activity and to gain insights from projects' reflections on their policy engagement over the research period. It was planned that two case-studies per programme would be undertaken; however, due to time constraints, this number was reduced to one per programme. Each project that consented to be a case study for the research was visited by the researcher, and a number of interviews with project staff were undertaken. Relevant project documentation contributed by the project

Table 1.1 Response to the survey undertaken

Programme	No. surveyed	No. responded	Response rate
LDSIP	9	7	77%
FRC	10	6	60%
CDP	19	10	52%
TOTAL	38	23	60%

The survey was e-mailed to the sample of projects: respondents could complete it by e-mail or over the phone. Data from the survey were coded and analysed using Excel. The questionnaire included a number of open-ended questions which were then analysed thematically.

A survey sample of 38 projects was selected, aiming for a two-thirds response rate. A total of 23 of the 38 projects responded (a 60% response rate overall and 88% of the target project sample identified by the CPA). The response rate from the three programmes is shown in Table 1.1

One heartening aspect of the responses was the level of response to the open-ended questions and the detail offered on issues identified. From a research perspective, it is important to recognise that the number surveyed is just over 10% of the projects within each programme (69 Partnerships, 180 CDPs and 89 FRCs).

was also reviewed (see Appendix 5 for details of the case-study approach).

• Interviews with key personnel. Informants from the three programmes and key actors within policy arenas from the community sector were interviewed over the summer months.

A total of 21 confidential interviews were held with representatives from organisations, agencies and others closely linked to the three programmes. It was considered that these individuals had insight and expertise on the nature of policy engagement by projects within the three programmes. The interviewees contributed nearly 25 hours of material to the research and provided a rich source of information and analysis on policy engagement.

• A briefing and consultation workshop with survey participants.

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[2] 'Projects' describes CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships that engaged in the research.

The purpose of this workshop was to present the information derived from the research towards

- ○ validating the findings on the nature of policy engagement by CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships, policy learning supports available and policy learning needs
- ○ exploring and discussing proposed possible responses to policy learning needs

Unfortunately, this workshop had to be replaced with a consultation document that was e-mailed to all survey participants for their response.

The research commenced in the final week of June 2006 and was completed in mid-September.

1.4   Focus and parameters of the research

It is important to recognise that though the three programmes share some commonality in relation to the recognition of community development as an effective approach to addressing poverty and disadvantage, the programmes are also quite distinct and different, with different histories, programme objectives, approaches and delivery mechanisms locally. Nationally, the programmes are also organised and delivered differently with varying agencies and government departments involved. This research presents a composite view of the issues identified by the research participants and, of necessity, takes a broad cross-programme approach to an analysis of the issues raised.

It is useful, at this stage, to state the parameters of this research. While the term 'policy' and 'policy engagement' can have many meanings and 'policy-making' is a process involving many interests and actors within and outside of Ireland, the focus of this research is on that part of the policy system outside of the formal political system that has been identified as having clear relevance to addressing poverty and social exclusion. Section 2 of the report expands on this further.

1.5   Structure of the report

This introductory section presents the background to the research, the issues the researcher was asked to address and the methodology applied. The rest of the report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** defines policy work and gives an overview of the anti-poverty policy context relevant to the three programmes. It also gives a brief description of the three programmes.

- **Section 3** contains the findings of the survey, describing the policy engagement of projects within the three programmes, level and areas of difficulty identified by the respondents, the policy learning and support needs identified and the sources of information, learning and support utilised.

- **Section 4** details the policy work and approaches of the three case-study projects.

- **Section 5** describes the challenges that were identified by the research participants in relation to their policy engagement within the current policy environment and locates these within the broader context of anti-poverty policy work.

- **Section 6** makes a number of proposals towards supporting the engagement of CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships and enhancing the effectiveness of the policy processes to achieve better outcomes from an anti-poverty perspective.

The report includes many direct comments from the survey respondents and people interviewed during the case study and who were key informants. References to secondary material (publications and so on) are signalled by the use of footnotes.

Section2 | Policy and the CDP, FCSRCP and LDSIP programme

2.1.1 Policy? Clarifying the terms

It is useful to clarify at the outset what this research sees as 'policy' and 'policy engagement'. Different kinds of policies exist, and the term is recognised as being both confusing and vague. For example, a Family Resource Centre involved in hosting a childcare service may have a whole set of policies and procedures that describe how that service is run. This is a 'procedures' policy. Another kind of policy can be a statement of values, aims and objectives that describe the group's approach to an issue, for example, a group's anti-racism policy.

However, for the purposes of this research, 'policy' is defined as

> *A statement of values, aims and objectives that a government wishes to realise, together with the strategies and instruments for achieving them[3].*

'Policy-making' has been described as

> *The term ascribed to the process whereby the government and the authorities reach decisions, set out priorities, satisfy competing interest groups and lay down the underlying approaches to their work[4]*

The terms 'policy work', 'policy activity' and 'policy engagement' are often used to describe a work approach that seeks to influence the policies of government and the State. From an anti-poverty perspective, the purpose of this kind of policy work is to seek to inform, influence and shape responses to poverty and social exclusion towards achieving meaningful positive outcomes for disadvantaged groups and communities. The broader goal is the achievement of a more equal society where barriers to participation are eliminated, the wealth and resources of the country are more equally distributed and people's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. For very many projects engaged in anti-poverty work, policy work is something that is an integral part of the work that they do and part of a project's strategic approach to addressing the issues it faces locally.

2.1.2 Engaging in policy

Irish policy making is shaped and influenced by a myriad of actors and arenas both within Ireland and outside of it. It consists of a complex interplay of organisations and individuals; formal procedures, such as those adopted in the Dail and the Courts; and informal processes, such as lobbying and networking. It is shaped by a range of influences such as the media and Irish membership of the European Union and United Nations. For the purposes of this research, the policy arena is largely limited to that operating within our national boundaries.

The policy system relevant to advancing an anti-poverty agenda is complex and multi-faced. Perhaps the most commonly recognised aspect of the system is the political system whereby governments are formed, legislation is prepared and passed by elected representatives and Dáil Committees advise on a range of legal, social, economic and financial areas.

However, the political system is just one part of the policy system and it is helpful to have an overview of other relevant arenas and initiatives that are part of the policy landscape. The broader national anti-poverty policy arena can be described as consisting of five key elements, and consideration of all of these can inform interventions in the policy cycle.

1. Policy initiatives

These are the specific policy proposals and programmes that government and statutory agencies develop and implement.

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[3] CWC (2006) *Equality Proofing, Promotion and Practice: A resource manual for the community sector* (forthcoming) p. 65.
[4] Harvey (1998) *Working for Change: A Guide to Influencing Policy in Ireland.* p.3.

They can be of a once-off or periodic nature. Such initiatives can include national social partnership agreements, the National Development Plan and various Task Forces and think-tank committees. Examples include the current Task Force on Active Citizenship and the National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2006-2008)

2. Policy frameworks and arenas

This is the 'architecture' consisting of the mechanisms that are developed to progress or implement a policy and it can be quite complex. For example, current institutional arrangements on poverty and social inclusion include a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development supported by a Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, a Management Group of Assistant Secretaries, Social Inclusion Units located within government departments, the Office for Social Inclusion located in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and an annual Social Inclusion Forum organised by the National Economic and Social Forum.

Sometimes, a policy may have a mechanism to steer, advise and/or implement the policy at many levels e.g. the Report of the Task Force on Violence Against Women (1997) recommended establishing a national steering committee, regional planning committees in each (then) health board area and local area networks.

These mechanisms can acknowledge the role and include representation and participation of the community and voluntary sectors within their structures. However that representation is often selected by the State. These mechanisms can have very differing *modus operandi* in terms of the selection and participation of stakeholders and their roles; governance, as well as the exercise of power and the dynamics within; working mechanisms and accountability; and the nature and type of outcomes possible.

3. Statutory policy institutions

These are bodies or institutions that have a specific policy brief and their programmes and activities are often very relevant to addressing poverty. Relevant statutory institutions includes those listed in Table 2.1 overleaf.

4. Policy activities

This constitutes the vast range of activities that groups and organisations use to engage in the policy system and to influence its outcomes. These can include making submissions on policy matters in response to invitations; attending consultative meetings; lobbying elected representatives; participating in policy arenas at local, regional and national levels; networking and building alliances and coalitions on issues; publicising and campaigning on issues; and engaging in protests, pickets and other forms of direct action.

5. Policy actors

These include the range of stakeholders with an interest in policy. From a poverty perspective, this range can include civil servants from government departments and state agencies, elected representatives, community groups and voluntary organisations, social partners, local development agencies, private sector interests and others. Each of these may have different interests in a policy, may or may not be involved in a policy arena and if so, may have differential access to the policy system and engage in very different ways with those policy arenas. The values, understandings and approaches to addressing and eliminating poverty of the various actors are also significant to what they may want to achieve from their engagement in policy.

From the preceding paragraphs, it is clear that the policy system prevalent in Ireland is both complex and nuanced and that charting a way through this landscape can be challenging for projects involved in the three programmes. However, the objectives, approaches, resources and delivery mechanisms of the three programmes provide a framework for the policy work of the projects.

Table 2.1 Social policy institutions

Lead government department	Policy institution
Social and Family Affairs	Combat Poverty Agency
	Family Support Agency
	Office of Social Inclusion
	NAPS Social In clusion Forum
Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	Pobal
	National Advisory Committee of the Community Development Programme
Education and Science	Educational Disadvantage Committee
	National Adult Learning Council
	National Office for Equity in Third Level Education
Health and Children	Institute of Public Health
	National Council on Ageing and Older People
	National Children's Office
Environment and Local Government	City and County Development Boards
	Private Residential Tenancies Board
Justice, Equality and Law Reform	Equality Authority
	National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
	National Disability Authority
	County Childcare Committees
	Strategic Monitoring Committee of the National Action Plan Against Racism
Taoiseach	National Economic and Social Forum
	Human Rights Commission
	National Economic and Social Council

2.2 Overview of the three programmes

The following paragraphs give an overview of the three programmes, the delivery and support mechanisms for each and available programme data that capture some of the work undertaken on policy[5]. In addition, a number of developments are taking place both nationally and within each programme that have been identified by research participants as having significance for the policy contribution of projects and the programmes themselves. One of these is the development of the next National Development Plan and, at the time of writing, the future role and level of support for the three programmes in the next Plan is unclear. Other developments are relevant to the each of the programmes themselves and have been signalled within each section below.

[5] Such data is derived from the different monitoring systems used by the three programmes. It is important to highlight that none of the three systems could be deemed to capture the complexity of policy work engaged in by projects within the three programmes. As policy engagement involves a range of activities, many undertaken collaboratively with other organisations, the quantitative data presented by the monitoring systems (SPEAK and SPOKE) cannot be deemed to be an accurate measure of the level of policy activity engaged in. It does, however, provide some indication of the policy activity engaged in.

2.2.1 The Community Development Programme

The Community Development Programme (CDP) was established in 1990 in recognition of the role of community development in tackling poverty and disadvantage. The Programme aims to address all areas of poverty and disadvantage and supports a number of projects located in communities affected by high unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, as well as projects working with specific target groups. Projects supported under the CDP (Community development projects or CDPs) are expected to have an anti-poverty, anti-exclusion focus, and the programme aims to 'challenge the causes of disadvantage/poverty and to offer new opportunities to those lacking choice, power and resources[6]'. Projects develop three-year plans based on the identification of local issues and needs.

Currently, over 180 projects receive core funding through the programme[7]. Funding to the programme is €23.947 million in 2006[8]. CDPs are normally companies limited by guarantee with voluntary boards of management.

While the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has overall responsibility for the programme, a National Advisory Committee, with regionally organised representation from the projects and with representation from others with expertise in community development, has an advisory role to the department and the Minister. Training and support to CDPs are provided through independent regional support agencies and specialist support agencies.

An evaluation of the programme published in 2002 highlighted that 86% of projects gave details of regular participation in conferences and seminars addressing policy issues of relevance beyond their own communities and that the majority indicated that this was a growing part of their work. A total of 86% of projects were also involved in active networking with other organisations both regionally and nationally, and 66% perceived this part of their work to be increasing. The evaluation found that a clear development path was evident for most projects with more mature projects becoming more active and effective in embracing issues of policy linked to their working base[9].

Using SPEAK (Strategic Planning, Evaluation and Knowledge), a self-evaluation system developed by Nexus Ltd., the programme can capture data on project activities across a range of areas, including policy work[10]. To capture policy activity, SPEAK focuses on seminars attended, engagement in networks and numbers of publications produced. SPEAK data for 2005 on activity in these areas by 52 CDPs are presented in Table 2.2. Education, health, childcare and equality are areas with the highest level of activity.

SPEAK also reports on 'time spent' on different areas and indicates that just 4.2% of all time spent by CDPs was on policy work (2,059 of 48,915 days). However, further analysis of other aspects of SPEAK data may give a somewhat different picture. Of the 17% of CDP time (8,247 days) spent with 'working partners', 51% of this was spent on

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[6] Cited in an evaluation of the programme undertaken by Nexus in 1999-2000 and published in 2002 Nexus (2002) *Evaluation of the Community Development Programme*. p 1.

[7] The evaluation highlighted a significant amount of further monies levered from other agencies and sources to resource local activities (Nexus 2002: 25).

[8] Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, personal communication, September 2006.

[9] Nexus 2000: 38-39.

[10] Projects enter their own data (both quantitative data and qualitative statements) and can generate their own reports and the system also permits the generation of national reports on aspects of projects' activities. While the generation of data and profiles of activities and issues at national level is of significant value to projects, the programme and others, the system has a number of features that affects the robustness of the data in relation to profiling the policy work of projects. The data is compiled by projects and there may be significant variation in understandings of what constitutes involvement in a 'network', for example. As much of policy work involves engaging with other stakeholders, activities are often jointly undertaken and thus, 'publications' for example, may include items that are produced with others and are not solely authored by the project. The strength of a database such as SPEAK lies in the maximum involvement of all project contributions and, with the CDP programme, engagement has varied from year to year.

Table 2.2   CDPs policy activity captured by SPEAK (2005)

Area	Sem/conf	Networks	Publications
Education	132	117	28
Health	75	63	12
Childcare	71	30	9
Equality	65	59	15
Domestic violence	42	22	15
Drug use	42	15	2
Employment	41	25	6
Housing	32	20	6
Environment	27	12	3
Crime/Justice	23	6	3
Amenities	23	4	3
Transport	11	3	1
Enterprise	8	1	3
TOTAL	**598**	**380**	**98**

'policy issues' (4,168 days or 9% of overall time). Of the 39% of time spent working with 'community target groups' (19,003 days), 32% of this was spent on 'policy issues' (6,129 days or 13% of overall time). This appears to indicate that addressing policy issues constitutes a significant proportion of the time spent with working partners and with community target groups.

The CDP programme has undergone a number of challenges over the years, including a curtailment of the expansion of the programme, cutbacks to some of its funding streams (such as enhanced funding) and an 'endorsement' process with City and County Development Boards[11] that has been acknowledged as contentious and conflictual in some areas[12].

2.2.2 The Family and Community Services and Resource Centre Programme or the Family Resource Centre Programme (FRCP)

The aim of the FRCP programme is to combat disadvantage by improving the functioning of the family unit. The services provided by FRCs are informed by a community development ethos that seeks to involve local communities in developing approaches to tackle the problems they face and in creating successful partnerships between the voluntary and statutory agencies in the areas concerned.

New groups entering the programme are expected to adhere to this principle and
• Have a commitment to an anti-poverty focus
• Provide support and act as a catalyst for community development activity
• Act as a resource in the community of which they are a part
• Promote co-ordination and co-operation between community, voluntary and statutory groups in the area of interest
• Involve local people within their management structures drawn from groups who themselves experience poverty and social exclusion, and
• Demonstrate a commitment, in principle and in practice, to operate from an equality perspective.

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[11] City and County Development Boards (CDBs) were established in each county and city in 2000. Led and supported by Local Authorities, but expected to act independently of them, CDBs' role is to promote co-operation and co-ordination among all agencies and development groups in their area. They produced 10-year strategies for the development of their areas in 2002, which were to be reviewed by 2005. Most have established Social Inclusion Measures Committees to support their focus on social inclusion.
[12] A number of interviewees described their experience in engaging with the CDB in negative terms deriving from, it would appear, CDBs approaching their role as 'approving' of CDP plans.

Established as a pilot programme in 1994 with just ten centres, there are currently 92 centres operating around the country, set to rise to a hundred centres by the end of 2006, with an estimated expenditure of €12.93 million. FRCs are companies limited by guarantee with voluntary boards of management.

Like the CDP programme, the policy and conditions of the programme are agreed by the Minister of Social and Family

activities, and 'policy work' is defined as the work that projects do on a range of activities that influence the policy of particular agencies, service providers or other organisations and that are likely to have significance beyond the projects' community.

Data for the year 2004, in which 62 projects participated, indicated that the time committed to this activity was 2.82% (1,546.77 days).

Table 2.3   FRC's policy activity captured by SPEAK (2004)

Issue	Sem/Conf	Networks
Childcare	222	129
Education	216	156
Equality	113	85
Domestic Violence	89	43
Disability	72	52
Employment	72	45
Housing	71	31
Drug Use	71	33
Physical Health	53	18
Mental Health	44	29
Conflict	33	8
Enterprise	32	11
Environment	29	20
Transport	20	7
Amenities	18	23
Crime	12	10
Tourism	1	2
Total	**1,168**	**702**

Affairs. However, the Family Support Agency (itself formally established in 2003), has overall responsibility for the management of the programme, including monitoring of centres, financial administration and executive decision-making. Regional Support Agencies (the same ones that work with CDPs) and Specialist Support Agencies play a development, support and advisory role to FRCs.

The Family Support Agency also uses SPEAK to capture information on project

SPEAK's output measures for policy work encompass a number of areas, including
• Attendance at seminars and conferences
• Membership of regional and national networks
and these are captured in Table 2.3.

At the end of June this year, the FRCs launched a new strategic plan for the Family Resource Centre National Forum – a support network to provide practical support to FRCs, established on a

voluntary basis in 1998. Its strategic plan 'Supporting Families, Building Communities' (2006-2009) identifies 'influencing national policy on family support through participation of the National Forum in key organisational and inter-agency fora' as one of its seven strategic priorities. A statement from the Forum states that it will seek representation on government advisory committees and participate in an increased number of policy-formation bodies'[13].

2.2.3 The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP)

The overall objective of the LDSIP is 'To counter disadvantage and promote equality and social and economic inclusion through the provision of funding and support to Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts that adopt a partnership approach to tackling local issues on the basis of comprehensive, integrated local development plans designed to counter social exclusion and to equitably target the opportunities and benefits of development to the most disadvantaged individuals and groups within their areas'.

Implemented by 69 area-based and community Partnerships and two Employment Pacts around Ireland, the LDSIP encompasses three action areas –
• Services for the unemployed
• Community development and
• Community-based youth initiatives

Partnerships are companies limited by guarantee whose Board of Directors brings together representatives from four sectors –
• The statutory sector, including government departments and state agencies and organisations
• Trades unions, employers and, in rural areas, farming organisations
• The community and voluntary sector
• Elected public representatives

(generally from local authorities). However, Partnerships' activities are not limited to the implementation of the LDSIP. A number of rural Partnerships also deliver the LEADER programme and many Partnerships are also contracted to deliver the Local Employment Service (LES).

At national level, the LDSIP is managed by Pobal (formerly Area Development Management Ltd), an independent, not-for-profit company established to manage programmes, on behalf of the government, aimed at combating social exclusion and promoting equality. Pobal's mission includes a commitment to contributing to policy development through the lessons learnt from the programmes it manages and one of its core actions is to inform and influence policy development at local, regional and national levels.

An explicit policy focus runs throughout the programme - one of the specific objectives of the LDSIP is 'To add value to the effective delivery of mainstream policies and programmes through the provision of linkage and co-ordination as they effect (sic) the long-term unemployed and the socially excluded and to put in place mechanisms to ensure local initiatives inform and strengthen policy development'. Furthermore, the stated principles of the measure include
• Developing mechanisms for mainstreaming lessons learned at local level and maximising their contribution to the policy making process.
• Applying community development approaches and principles to achieve the participation and full involvement of disadvantaged groups and communities in planning and decision making at every level.

By their very structure, partnership companies themselves are policy arenas, bringing together relevant stakeholders with the purpose of addressing poverty and social exclusion within their areas. Over the years, the practice of

13 FRCNF (2006) *Family Resource Centres to become significant voice in future social partnerships.* Press Release 21st June.

partnership within this context has added new insight into the processes of multi-agency engagement and the challenges that need to be addressed to strengthen such approaches to address poverty and social exclusion[14].

Pobal uses SCOPE (Systems for Co-Ordinated Programme Evaluation) as its programme monitoring and evaluation mechanism to capture data on the LDSIP.

The SCOPE database is the main mechanism for gathering and analysing quantitative data. Unlike SPEAK, SCOPE does not gather information on the policy activity of Partnerships *per se*, but it does quantify the number of networks that Partnerships are engaged in under the LDSIP.

While a report on SCOPE data for the LDSIP acknowledges that much of the work under the three action areas takes place through the various networks and collaborations led by Partnerships, Pobal believes that, given the variety of ways that Partnerships contribute to policy development through their own activities and their engagement in other arenas, this is an under-representation of the level of inter-sectoral collaboration undertaken by Partnerships.

Partnerships and the LDSIP are in transition. In 2003, the Ministers for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Heritage and Local Government and

Justice, Equality and Law Reform initiated a review of local and community development structures. Resulting from this, it is intended that from January 2007, all areas of the country will be covered by Partnership companies and, in rural areas, LEADER, the Rural Social Scheme and the LDSIP will be implemented by one company in each area.
This process involves significant restructuring not only of programme delivery mechanisms, but also of the alignment of the different programmes themselves. The process has placed considerable demands on Partnership companies, Partnership networks and Pobal and will continue to do so into 2007.

2.3   Conclusion

The previous sections gave an overview into the policy system relevant to addressing poverty and social exclusion in Ireland within which projects from the three programmes operate. It also provided an overview of the work of three programmes, the programme approach to policy work and some data on policy activities. In recent years, all three programmes have witnessed significant developments affecting their current and future role and work. The next section of the report describes in more detail the policy work of the programmes.

Table 2.4 No. of networks/collaborations supported under the LDSIP

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005
No. networks	911	1,127	1,137	1,048

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[14] Pobal (2006) *Partnership Dynamics Key Lessons from Local Partnership in Practice*. This study identifies three models of partnership based on an analysis of the quality of the partnership process and identifies the ingredients or characteristics necessary for effective partnership work.

Section 3 | Policy engagement of CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships

3.1 Introduction

This section gives an overview of the policy engagement identified by CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships in their survey responses. The questionnaire sought information in the following areas –

- The age of the project and whether the project had engaged in policy activity over the period 2000-2006
- The issues on which projects undertook policy-focused work
- The range of activities engaged in
- The main policy mechanisms that projects engaged in at local, local authority, regional, national and international levels
- Opportunities that projects would have liked to engage in but were unable to
- Main areas of difficulty identified in relation to policy work and policy learning and support needs
- Supports available for policy: sources of information and learning that were found to be helpful on anti-poverty policy work
- How anti-poverty policy work undertaken by projects could be strengthened and supported to work more for the advantage of marginalised groups and their advocates in Ireland

The responses provide an in-depth overview, or map, of the policy work of projects involved in the three programmes. Information from the survey is presented in a cross-programme manner to facilitate ease of analysis.

3.2 Profile of respondents and level of engagement in policy work

A total of 23 of the 38 projects responded, giving an overall response rate of 60%, and an 88% response rate of the target sample[15].

Table 3.1   Response to the survey

Programme	No. surveyed	No. responded	Response rate
LDSIP	9	7	77%
FRC	10	6	60%
CDP	19	10	52%
TOTAL	**38**	**23**	**60%**

Figure 3.1 details the age profile of the respondents.

Fig. 3.1 Age profile of CDPs, FRCs[16] and Partnerships.
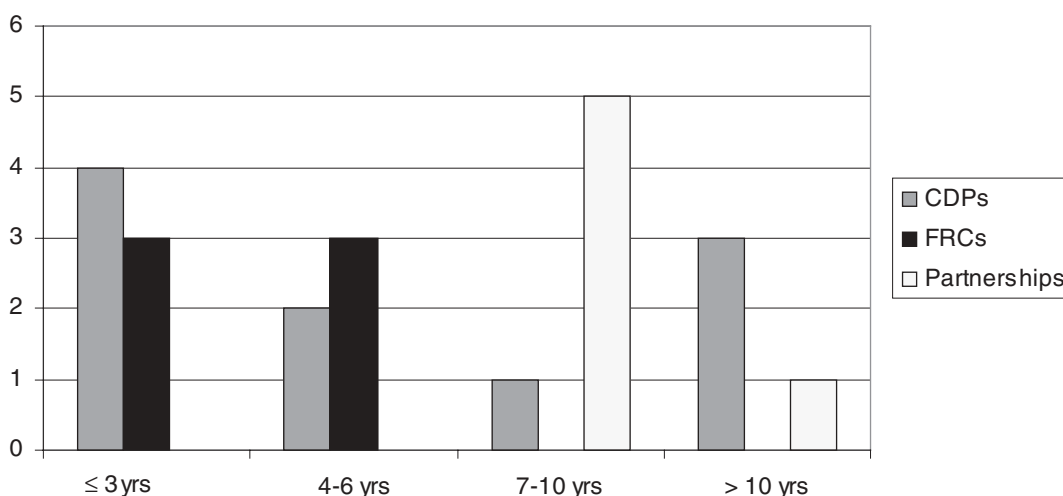
Projects were asked whether or not they had engaged in policy activity over the period 2000-2006. Of the 23 respondents, all but one answered in the affirmative[17].

Fig 3.2 Engagement in policy activity 2000-2006
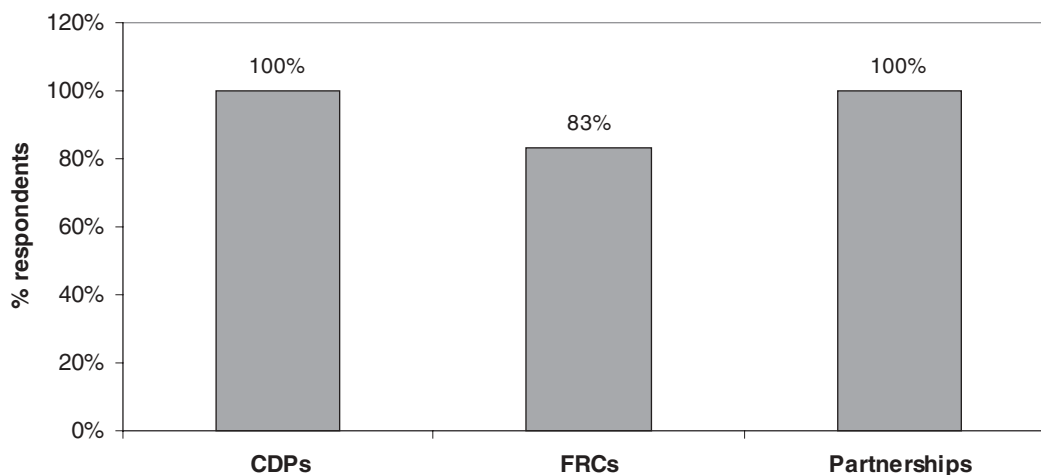
3.3 Issues on which projects undertook policy-focused work

Table 3.2 gives details on the range and prevalence of issues on which projects undertook policy-focused work within and across the three programmes. The findings show that the projects undertake policy-focusd work on a wide range of issues, although the issues themselves vary from programme to programme. The four most frequently cited issues for CDPs included equality, non-formal education, inter-cultural and anti-racism work and services and facilities. For FRCs, the four most frequently cited issues where policy-focused work was undertaken included childcare, equality, services and facilities and housing and accommodation. For Partnerships, the four most frequently cited issues included training, un/employment and enterprise; childcare; inter-cultural and anti-racism work and non-formal education.

Table 3.2 Issues on which projects undertook policy-focused work (2000-2006)

Issues	No. of CDPs (%) Total = 10	No. of FRCs (%) Total = 5	No. of Partnerships (%) Total = 7
Equality (including gender equality)	7 (70%)	3 (60%)	3 (43%)
Non-formal education	6 (60%)	1 (20%	4 (57%)
Inter-cultural and anti-racism work	6 (60%)	2 (40%)	5 (71%)
Services and facilities	6 (60%)	3 (60%)	4 (57%)
Health and well-being	5 (50%)	2 (40%)	2 (29%)
Housing and accommodation	4 (40%)	2 (40%)	2 (29%)
Childcare	4 (40%)	5 (100%)	5 (71%)
Youth work	4 (40%)	1 (20%)	3 (43%)
Training, un/employment and enterprise	4 (40%)	1 (20%)	6 (86%)
Drugs	3 (30%)	1 (20%)	1 (14%)
Welfare rights and entitlements	3 (30%)	2 (40%)	0 (0%)
Other	3 (30%)	1 (20%)	1 (14%)

For CDPs, 'Other' included work on a number of Traveller-specific issues, including accommodation, health and economy; engaging in local authority development planning processes; involvement in services and supports for full and part-time family carers; internal membership consultations; building inter-agency approaches; and supporting the advocacy work of other organisations. For FRCs, 'Other' included work on the Disability Bill. For Partnerships, 'Other' included research and lobbying on rural deprivation.

Across all the three programmes, projects engage in policy-focused work on multiple issues. Of the ten CDPs that responded, eight (80%) indicated that they undertook policy-focused work in three or more issues over the identified period. Of the five FRCs that responded, all indicated that they undertook policy-focused work on three or more issues. Of the seven Partnerships that responded, five (71%) indicated that they undertook policy-focused work on three or more issues

3.4 Policy activities engaged in

The questionnaire assessed the range of activities commonly associated with policy work. The following paragraphs and tables detail the projects' responses.

There are a number of interesting points that can be made from the information detailed above. The significance and prevalence of joint or collective work with other stakeholders as a policy activity are notable. The participation of projects across all three programmes in policy arenas as a distinct policy activity is also significant.

Further analysis of the response to this question reveals that projects also adopt a versatile approach to policy work, with the vast majority indicating that they had undertaken more than half the identified activities over the period in question. Of the seven Partnerships surveyed, all had engaged in four or more of the seven identified policy-oriented activities. Of the ten CDPs surveyed, nine had engaged in four or more of the seven identified policy-oriented activities. Of the five FRCs that responded, four had engaged in four or more of the seven identified policy-oriented activities.

Table 3.3   Policy activities engaged in by CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships

| Type of activity	No. of CDPs (%) Total = 10	No. of FRCs (%) Total = 5	No. of Partnerships (%) Total = 7
Networking	9 (90%)	5 (100%)	7 (100%)
Joint work on positions and strategies	9 (90%)	4 (80%)	7 (100%)
Participating in policy arenas	9 (90%)	4 (80%)	7 (100%)
Mainstreaming good practice	8 (80%)	3 (60%)	6 (86%)
Responding to requests for policy submissions	8 (80%)	2 (40%)	6 (86%)
Campaigning	7 (70%)	2 (40%)	3 (43%)
Research	6 (60%)	2 (40%)	6 (86%)

3.5   Main identified policy mechanisms and arenas engaged with

With this overview of policy work undertaken by projects, let us now turn to look at the arenas and mechanisms in which projects engage. All respondents were asked to identify the mechanisms and arenas that they engaged with at different levels – local, local authority/county, regional, national and EU/international. The following paragraphs and figures map the range of levels and arenas in which projects are active.

Information on each programme begins with an overview of the 'levels' in which projects are involved and then continues with a 'map' detailing the specific policy arenas identified by the respondents.

The map describes two distinct but related spaces. 'Policy arenas' includes statutory-recognised and –organised frameworks in which projects engage. 'Policy mechanisms' refers to other policy spaces which may or may not be linked to the statutory policy arenas at each level. Some of these are independently organised, for example a regional network of Traveller CDPs or NGOs involved in disability issues, while others may have a range of stakeholders active within their network perhaps including state agencies, for example on addressing the needs of asylum-seekers. While these spaces are distinct and distinctive, there is much diversity within both and both operate independently and interdependently for the purposes of policy making and policy engagement.

Fig 3.3 Levels at which CDPs engaged in policy activity (2000-2006)
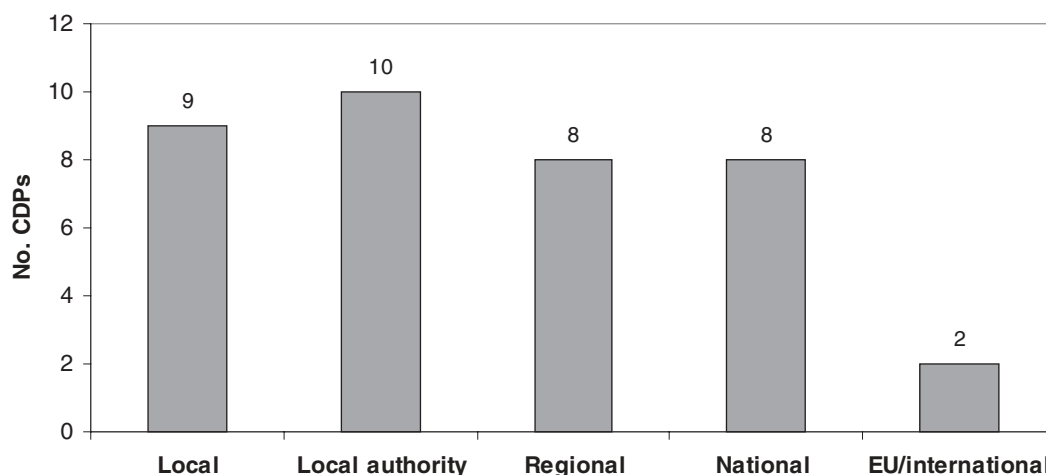
Fig 3.4   Map of policy arenas and mechanisms in which CDPs engaged.

CDPs	Policy arenas	Policy mechanisms
Local	• Local Partnership company and sub-committees • Drugs Task Force • Local Area Network on Violence Against Women • RAPID Area Implementation Team	• Issue-specific networks/forums (Traveller-specific forums – area-based Traveller Accommodation Forum space for Travellers; Site Forum meetings; Disability Forums, Asylum-seekers, elderly, ethnic groups etc) • Local CDP network • Public forums convened on particular issues • Direct links with other organisations
Local Authority/County	• Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees • Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees • County Development Board and sub-structures/working groups e.g. Social Inclusion Measures Committee and sub-committees • Community Forums • County Childcare Committees and sub-committees	• May have an equality or anti-poverty platform within the Community Forum e.g. Laois Anti-Poverty Strategy steering committee, South Dublin Community Platform. • CDP Network • Membership of another organisation e.g. Donegal CWC • Participation in consultations organised by VEC, HSE, Local Authority, CDB on their activities and plans.
Regional	• Regional Planning Committee on Violence Against Women and sub-committees • Committees convened by statutory agency and semi-state bodies e.g. FAS Advisory Committee on Disability in one region, HSE subcommittee on respite care, suicide etc	• Cross-border forums (anti-poverty) • CDP regional forum/networks (geographical and issue-focused e.g. anti-racism/integration, gay & lesbian equality • Issue-based initiatives e.g. health service delivery, European Forum on Women • Organisation-based initiatives e.g. ITM regional network
National	• National policy consultations usually led by specific departments or agencies e.g. Office for Social Inclusion and NAPS Incl; D/SFA consultations on family; HSE consultations; D/JELR on National Plan for Women • Presentations and submissions to Joint Oireachtas Committees • National Advisory Committee of CDP programme	• National organisation issue-focused consultations e.g. CWC, EAPN, NCCRI & Integrating Ireland, NWCI • Membership of national organisations and participation in their policy activities e.g. CWC, ITM, NTWF, Pavee Point, Residents Against Racism, NCCRI, NCCWN, NWCI, Banulacht, NAMHI, Age & Opportunity and others • Participation in Combat Poverty 'Building Healthy Communities' initiative.
EU/International		• Through membership of organisations e.g. EAPN • Transnational sectoral links

Five of the six FRCs responded to this question and described their engagement as follows -

Fig 3.5 Levels at which FRCs engaged in policy activity (2000-2006)
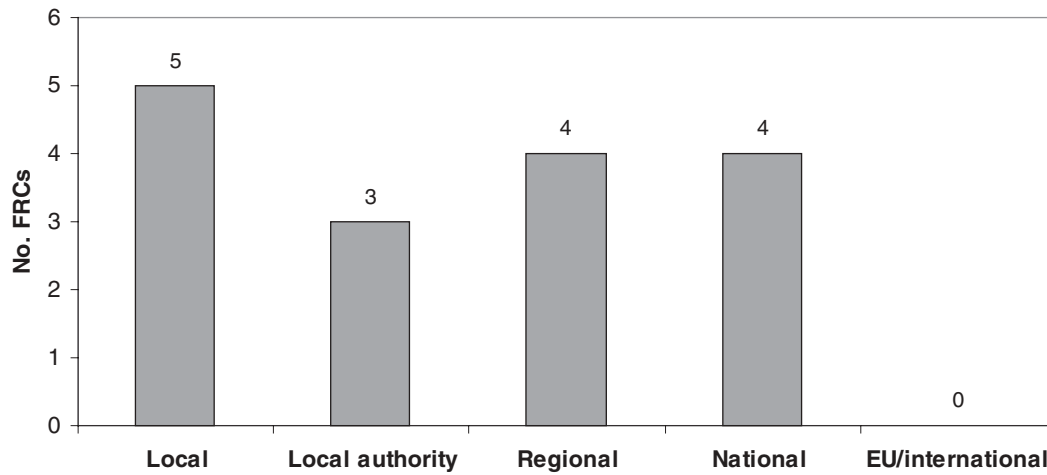
Figure 3.6 gives details of the policy arenas and mechanisms in which FRCs engage at different levels.

Fig 3.6 Map of policy arenas and mechanisms in which FRCs engaged

FRCs	Policy arenas identified	Policy mechanisms identified
Local	• Local partnership company and sub-committees • Local Area Network on Violence Against Women • Local committee of County Childcare Committee • VEC – on adult education	• Issue-specific networks/forums e.g. immigration, youth issues, disability, childcare • Issue-focused public forums • 'Cohesion processes' • Lobbying on an issue with others e.g. on the Disability Bill
Local Authority	• Local Authority Homeless Forum and housing initiatives • CDB & SIMs • Community Forum • City/county childcare committee	
Regional	• Regional Planning Committee on Violence Against Women • City of Dublin Youth Services Board • VEC – adult education • Policy consultations e.g. NAPs	• Regional Forum of FRCs and sub-groups (e.g. on violence against women) • Regional Network of CDPs & FRCs • Regional Equality for Women Measure meetings
National	• Consultations by Family Support Agency on areas such as its strategic plan and programmes	• National Forum of FRCs • Initiative-focused mechanisms e.g. Equality for Women Measure (Pobal) • Issue-focussed consultations led by national organisations such as NWCI, CWC and internal policy mechanisms of national organisations

Fig 3.7 Levels at which Partnerships engaged in policy activity (2000-2006)
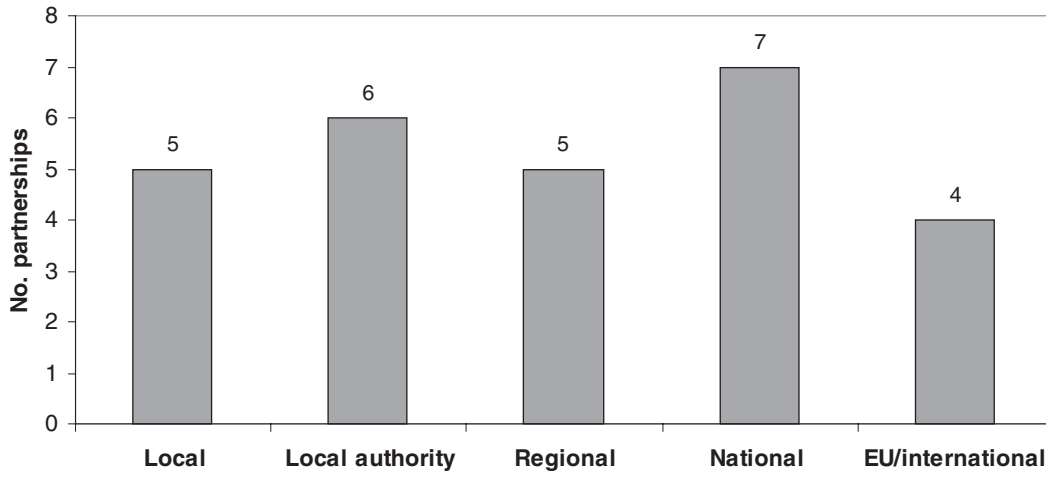
Figure 3.8 describes the policy arenas and mechanisms that Partnerships engage in at each level.

Fig 3.8 Map of policy arenas and mechanisms in which Partnerships engaged[18]

Partnerships	Policy arenas	Policy mechanisms
Local	• Drugs Task Force • RAPID Area Implementation Team	• Inter-agency area-based policy networks and steering groups on local initiatives e.g. cohesion, drugs, immigrant outreach • Issue-based forums e.g. Immigrant forum • Participation on boards of other NGOs e.g. a Family Resource Centre • Supported community inputs into local planning
Local Authority/County	• Statutory agency sub-committees e.g. VEC sub-committee on youth affairs • County Childcare Committees • County Development Board and structures e.g. SIMs, other sub-groups and CDB initiatives • PEACE II Task Force • Local authority steering group on Integrated Pilot Area initiative • Homeless Forum • SPCs • Community Forum	• Inter-agency networks/steering groups on service provision e.g. a local area, rural transport, adult literacy referral, Travellers, supported employment, sports partnerships, enterprise • City-wide anti-racism strategy/network & Action for Equality Network • Electoral area Forum; issue-focussed forum e.g. Travellers

18 This map includes non-LDSIP-related mechanisms as well as LDSIP-related mechanisms. Respondents identified policy mechanisms linked to other programmes that Partnerships are engaged in e.g. LEADER, CLÁR, RSS, ACCEL and others. These have been included to provide a comprehensive overview of Partnerships' policy activity.

Partnerships	Policy arenas	Policy mechanisms
Regional	• Statutory agency issue-focussed forum e.g. on mental health responses • Inter-agency 'cohesion' mechanisms e.g. with Teagasc, FAS etc • Statutory agency initiatives e.g. Teagasc rural smallholder initiative • EQUAL regional networks • Regional Assembly • Regional development bodies e.g. Shannon Development, Udaras • Equal Development Partnerships • Regional networks on issues such as enterprise' • PEACE II	• Cross-border initiatives – steering groups and boards of management
National	• NESF Plenary sessions • Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	• PLANET and its sub-groups • Community Partnerships Network and its sub-groups • CLE & ILSU • Membership of national organisations e.g. EAPN, CWC, IRL, NYC, IRC, Wheel • Pobal/ADM networks and groups
EU/International		• Through organisation membership e.g. EAPN • REIIS • LEED (OECD)

Projects from all three programmes identify activity in similar policy arenas at local and Local Authority/County level, and both CDPs and FRCs indicate engagement within local Partnership companies and their structures. However at regional level, Partnerships engage in a broader range of inter-agency activity with statutory agencies.

At national level, projects from all three programmes indicate engagement with programme policy mechanisms including, for CDPs, the National Advisory Committee on the CDP programme, for FRCs, the National Forum for FRCs and for Partnerships, the Partnerships Networks and Pobal networks and groups. Similarly, projects across all three programmes indicate involvement with independent national organisations such as EAPN, CWC, NWCI and others.

What is quite striking is the multi-level engagement by projects from all three programmes. Eight (80%) of the CDP respondents indicated that they are involved in policy arenas and mechanisms at three or more levels. Four (80%) of the respondent five FRCs indicated that they were involved in policy arenas and mechanisms at three or more levels and five (71%) of the respondent Partnerships indicated that they were involved in policy arenas and mechanisms at three or more levels.

With this overview of the level and type of engagement in different policy arenas and different levels, let us now turn to what respondents described in relation to perceived absences in policy inputs.

3.6 Absences in policy engagement

Respondents were asked whether there were anti-poverty policy opportunities or initiatives that they would have liked to engaged in but were unable to over the period 2000-2006.

Of the 22 projects that responded to this question and 15 responded in the affirmative, six in the negative, and one responded with 'don't know'.

Fig 3.9 Absences in policy engagement
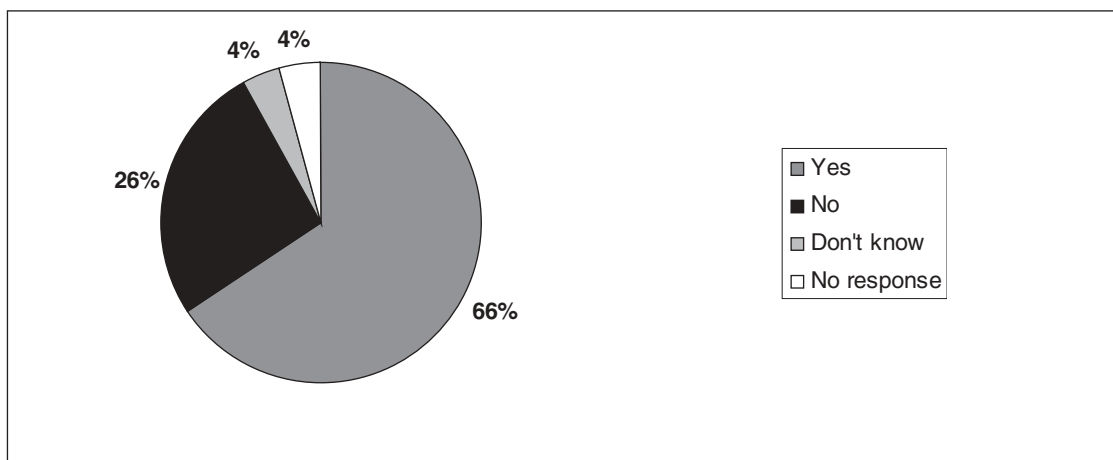
An analysis of the reasons for not engaging is quite revealing. Eleven projects cited the lack of resources as the main reason for not engaging. This included the lack of staff resources, a lack of time available to pursue policy opportunities and a lack of funding to do research and consultations. Also highlighted was the difficulty in trying to balance demands from locally based work with that of policy work.

> *I'm sure there were loads [of opportunities not engaged in]. The main block is getting the work done – there's a tension between the work on the ground and effecting change in policy. That's the sustainable work but you're doing capacity-building locally and it makes it difficult to engage.*

Other reasons given included that the project was very young and the focus was on developing the capacity internally at that time; the difficulties of getting people from disadvantaged groups involved in policy development (examples given were asylum seekers and ethnic groups); and the lack of an anti-poverty action forum/network to help give the work more focus – one specific example given was the lack of a national CDP network.

Of the three responses that identified policy opportunities or initiatives they would like to have engaged in, areas identified were -

• Migrant issues – employment, accommodation and family issues
• Domestic violence
• Addressing the needs of different ethnic groups
• Asylum-seekers

3.7 Reported difficulties in undertaking policy work

The survey asked an open-ended question on whether projects had encountered any difficulties in undertaking policy work over the period 2000-2006. All of the respondents answered this question and the majority of projects across all three programmes reported that they encountered difficulty.

Fig 3.10 Levels of reported difficulty in engaging in policy work across all three programmes
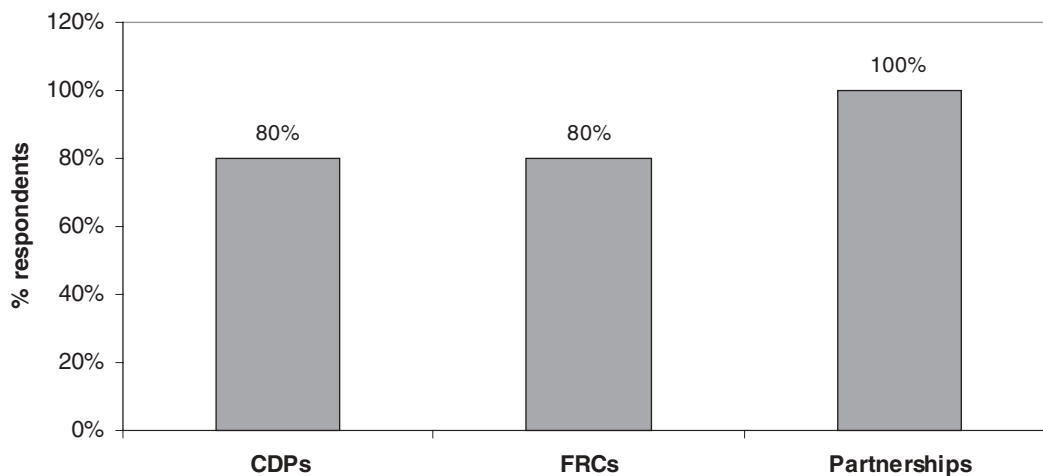
Respondents were asked to describe what the main difficulties were. Nineteen responded and an analysis of the responses identified the following areas –

Table 3.4   Area of cited difficulty

Area of cited difficulty	No. of responses
Lack of resources	10
Programme constraints	4
Lack of progress from policy initiative	3
Expertise deficit	3
Lack of opportunity to access resources for this kind of work	2
Information deficit	2
Other	2

• Lack of resources included a lack of staff and skills available, lack of funding to resource policy work, reliance on voluntary management committee members and the demands from locally based work.

> *Staff are very over-stretched with actual on-the-ground actions and programme delivery.*

• Programme constraints refer to perceptions that policy work as an activity receives insufficient resources as a programme activity. Comments on this included

> *There is a definite pressure from funders and the State not to engage in what they term political work, which is often simply campaigning on issues of poverty, access, discrimination and rights.*

• Lack of progress from the policy initiative – this refers to the response to the issues of concern raised by projects.

> *The main difficulty encountered was evidence that our issues were being taken on board by the particular agency. We have been seen in some instances to be making complaints about the system versus trying to find a solution in partnership to overcome the issue.*

> *Agreed actions [are] not being followed up. Working with local*

> *authorities tends to get lost in politics or other supposedly more pressing matters taking priority. Similarly, an excellent and comprehensive report by the Oireachtas committee was then blocked by the Department when it came to implementation stage. As a result a lot of energy and research has resulted in little progress in the 3 years since the report was produced.*

• Expertise deficit – this relates to perceived deficiencies in knowledge and skills within the project, however, one project pointed out that the quality of external consultants was also an issue.

• Lack of opportunity to access resources for this kind of work – this included funding for research and facilities. One project commented that when they had NOW funding they had the resources for a policy worker but not since.

• Information deficit – refers to a lack of relevant information from an agency on an issue, and the lack of updated, relevant datasets on groups and regions.

• Other comments included the very real challenge of getting to Dublin-based meetings when one is based five hours away. Another comment simply said -

> *Too many [difficulties] to go into detail*

Thus, the origin of the bulk of difficulties identified lie in the lack of resources available to undertake policy work – a reason also highlighted as fundamental to projects not engaging in policy work.

3.8 Main identified policy learning and support needs

One aim of this research was to identify the policy learning and support needs of projects across the three programmes. The following areas were examined:

- 'Knowledge of the policy system related to the issues we address' which referred to a project's knowledge of the policy landscape relating to the focus and work of the project.
- 'Identifying a policy focus to the issues we address and developing policy responses'. This referred to the process whereby a project makes the links between the issues manifesting themselves within their area, the structural causes of poverty and the relevant policy arenas and mechanisms where these can be influenced.
- 'Tools and techniques for influencing policy' relates to the range of knowledge and skills helpful and necessary to engage effectively in the policy cycle.

Table 3.5 captures their responses.

Some of the respondents also included 'Other' comments on
- The desire to build the capacity of people within the community and within the voluntary management committee on policy issues to equip them with the interest and the skills on influencing and changing policy (3 respondents)

In general as a new FRC we were looking for support in so many areas (that) policy initiatives were well down the list. However we would be looking for more support and training especially for the management members in order to feel confident to undertake policy initiatives on our own. While as co-ordinator I would have knowledge of tools and techniques, the main areas of training I feel we need has to be aimed at our Voluntary Management Committee.

- An identified source of information and research on issues relevant locally (2 comments)
- How to document the project's experience and turn it into evidence
- The prevalence of a services provision response to issues presented.

Local groups have got caught up with providing services and chasing grants - it's not creating change locally and nationally. We need to get people to change their mindsets - build capacity to change policy as opposed to setting up services.

Table 3.5   Main policy learning and support needs identified.

Area	No. of CDPs (%) Total = 9	No. of FRCs (%) Total = 5	No. of Partnerships (%) Total = 7
Knowledge of the policy system	8 (88%)	5 (83%)	5 (71%)
Tools and techniques - influencing policy	8 (88%)	4 (66%)	5 (71%)
Identify policy focus, develop responses	5 (55%)	5 (83%)	3 (30%)
Other	3 (33%)	3 (50%)	2 (28%)

Quite a high number of projects from all three programmes indicated learning and support needs in relation to knowledge of the policy system and the ways of influencing it, and, for FRCs, also on identifying a policy focus to their work.

3.9 Main identified sources of support, information and learning found helpful on policy work

The survey also asked projects to identify the range of supports that projects use to assist them with their policy work. An analysis of the 22 responses to this open-ended question revealed the following sources -

• Internal programme support and policy mechanisms: For the CDP programme, this includes Regional and Specialist Support Agencies; for the FRCs, it includes Regional Support Agencies, Regional Forums and the National Forum; for the LDSIP, it includes support from Pobal liaison officers and internal sub-groups, Community Partnerships Network and PLANET.

• Other organisations and networks: These include non-statutory organisations such as the CWC and Donegal CWC, NWCI, Aontas, National Collective of Women's Networks, Banulacht and Foroige. Networks include issue-based networks such as a Local Area Network on Violence Against Women and simply networking with other organisations and people.

• Organisation's own resources: This includes contributions from staff, management committees, sub-committees and budget.

• Other sources: This largely includes publications such as those from the Combat Poverty, CWC, EAPN, Changing Ireland[19], research from the Equality Authority and Combat Poverty, electronic information such as Community Exchange and websites of agencies and organisations. It also includes grants for research from agencies such as Pobal, the Equality Authority, the Combat Poverty and others.

• 'Policy arenas' refers to the actual policy arenas that projects engaged in.

As documented in Table 3.6., almost all projects across the three programmes indicate the availability of internal programme support and policy mechanisms to undertake policy work. A good proportion also highlights the role of independent national organisations and networking with others, and a lesser number identify the availability of publications from both statutory and non-statutory bodies. Significantly, the policy arenas themselves that projects engage in figure quite low as an available support.

Table 3.6   Main supports available to undertake policy work

Area	No of CDPs (%) Total= 9	No. of FRCs (%) Total = 6	No. of Partnerships (%) Total = 7
Internal programme support and policy mechanisms	9 (100%)	5 (83%)	7 (100%)
Other organisations and networks	6 (66%)	3 (50%)	4 (57%)
Organisation's own resources	2 (22%)	1 (14%)	6 (86%)
Other sources (information and resources)	4 (44%)	3 (50%)	3 (24%)
Departments, local statutory agencies, local authority	2 (22%)	4 (66%)	1 (14%)
Policy arenas	0	0	1 (14%)

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[19] 'Changing Ireland' is the national newsletter of the CDP programme, funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Respondents were also asked to identify the main sources of information and learning found helpful and responses clustered around the following areas -

- Publications – included newsletters and information from organisations such as the CWC, EAPN, Pobal, NCCRI, the EU, as well as Community Exchange and specific policy guides/resources from Combat Poverty[20].
- Other organisations – these included project and programme partners locally and also included national organisations such as the EAPN, CWC, IRL, CLE, the ILSU, Treoir and Age & Opportunity.
- Programme mechanisms included links with other projects within the programme and programme support mechanisms such as Pobal Liaison Officers and the two Partnerships networks, Regional Support Agencies and FRCs' Regional and National Forums.
- Own organisation – this referred to internal resources such as staff and management committee members and activities such as research, case-studies and the project's own activities such as consultations.
- Policy arenas – just two respondents identified their participation within policy arenas such as a County Childcare Committee and County Development Board structures as a source of information and learning.

- Statutory bodies identified included the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Equality Authority.

3.10 Strengthening and supporting anti-poverty policy work to work more for the advantage of marginalised groups and their advocates into the future in Ireland

Respondents were offered an opportunity to identify ways that their policy work could achieve more for marginalised groups. Twenty (87%) respondents answered this question. Responses clustered around three areas –

- programme-related proposals on enhancing the policy work of projects and maximising the policy potential of the programme
- proposals designed to make the policy process more effective and efficient
- proposals that relate to the wider political context in which poverty exists in Ireland today and is addressed.

Table 3.7   Main sources of information and learning on anti-poverty policy work

Sources of information and learning	Times cited
Publications – newsletters, circulars, policy publications	12
Other organisations	8
Programme mechanisms	7
Meetings, seminars, conferences, events	5
Own organisation	4
Policy arenas	2
Statutory bodies	2
Total responses	**22**

[20] A specific author was mentioned here – Brian Harvey. Harvey has written *A Guide to Influencing Policy* published by Combat Poverty and it is assumed that this is what is referred to.

Table 3.8   Proposals to enhance and support anti-poverty policy work

Area	CDPs (10)	FRCs (4)	Partnership (6)
Enhancing the programme	8	4	6
Enhancing the policy process	5	0	3
Wider political context	3	0	0
Total	**10**	**4**	**6**

- Programme-related proposals. There was some difference between the responses from projects within the three programmes.
    - CDPs' proposals included more resources for networking, training, staff, programme specific publications on aspects of policy and the need for a national mechanism to support CDPs in policy work and feed into the department.

    We're working on a shoe-string – there's too much time spent chasing money and not enough time to do policy work that we want and need to do.

    - FRCs' proposals included maximising the potential of the SPEAK monitoring data, maximising the potential of the newly established National Forum and training for staff and voluntary management committees.

    I believe that the FRC national forum needs to have a greater presence in the national arena and in order for our policy work to have a greater impact we need to be seen as a major player in the whole area of anti-poverty work. We are currently working on this within the forum but I believe that this is the first step needed because until we have that standing and policy work we undertake will not have the impact required regardless of the content or quality.

    - Partnerships' proposals included the need for a policy or advocacy mechanism within the programme, platforms to share information and learning on best practice across the programme and locally, dedicated staff with a policy remit and more time to pilot initiatives so that learning can be maximised.

- Enhancing the policy process. Proposals here advocated a greater synergy between regional and national policy initiatives and greater impact of policy initiatives on mainstream practice. Other proposals related to making the policy process itself more effective including creating opportunities to address new and emerging issues. Better consultation processes were also called for –

    Identify what consultation is needed with the CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships and what form this needs to take.

    This included involving people in policy design, not just consulting them at the beginning of a policy process; supporting their participation in policy development not just their representation and allocating personnel to support policy development within policy mechanisms. One example here was a proposal from a SIM Committee to employ a policy development worker to resource the county. Another proposed building strong networks of anti-poverty groups to develop and ensure an anti-poverty focus within policy mechanisms.

• Wider political context. Proposals on this area included advocating strong and comprehensive equality and poverty proofing and enhanced protection to those groups experiencing disadvantage[21]; the commitment of more resources dedicated to real outcomes locally on specific areas such as Traveller accommodation and education and better outcomes from existing spending.

Conclusion

Projects from the three programmes have clearly described a highly sophisticated response to a complex policy environment characterised by multi-tasking on multiple issues in many arenas. The vast majority encounters difficulties in engaging in policy work; however, the nature of these lies mainly in the absence of adequate resources to support policy engagement. A high proportion of projects across the three programmes also indicates policy learning and support needs in a number of areas.

These are knowledge of the policy system, techniques to influence policy and identifying a policy focus to the issues on hand and developing policy responses. .Projects also describe a matrix of support drawn upon from internal programme mechanisms and external sources to sustain and support policy engagement. Proposals to strengthen and support anti-poverty policy work focused on enhancing programme mechanisms to influence policy and project capacity to engage, on improving the policy-making processes within the arenas in which projects from the three programmes are active; and on ensuring that the more macro context in which anti-poverty policy work is undertaken delivers better outcomes for people in poverty.

This portrait provides a detailed backdrop to an analysis of the experience and practice of policy engagement detailed in the next section.

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[21] One respondent highlighted that there is very little attention given to anti-poverty approaches in policy making generally. Another commented that there has been a row-back on anti-poverty and equality gains made earlier e.g. the amendment to the Equality legislation and the criminalisation of trespass.

Section 4 | Case-studies on the policy work of a CDP, FRC and Partnership

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to highlight the range and depth of issues and arenas with which projects within each of the three programmes are engaged through a case-study of a project from each programme. This section presents each of the three case studies under a number of common headings: a brief description of the organisation, the context and environment in which it operates, the approach or strategy it uses in its policy work and details of policy arenas engaged in.

Though all three programmes include community development and anti-poverty work as both an objective and a work approach, projects have adopted different strategies to their policy work and are engaged in different policy arenas and mechanisms. This due to a number of reasons including –

- The differences in the purpose and focus of each of the three programmes. Wexford Area Partnership, for example, is a policy arena in its own right.

- The responsiveness of each project to its local area and its flexibility in approach to the issues on hand. St. Brigid's Family & Community Centre's role in the Waterford Inner City Cohesion Process is an example here.

- The existence of a policy arena to address an issue. Galway Traveller Movement has addressed Traveller health issues in a range of arenas.

4.2 Case-study Community Development Project - Galway Traveller Movement

Overview:

A partnership organisation of Travellers and settled people working together to achieve equality and self-determination for the Traveller community in Galway city, the Galway Traveller Movement (GTM) (formerly the Galway Traveller Support Group) was established in 1994. The project became part of the CDP programme in 1996. GTM's vision is '(to seek) to achieve full equality for Travellers and to accomplish full participation of Travellers in social, economic, political and cultural life as well as the broader enhancement of social justice'. Its activities include a primary health care project, an Equality for Women project, a Community Employment Scheme, as well as continuing work on accommodation, youth work, culture, equality/discrimination, rural development work, Traveller economy and the media. Members of the Traveller community (at least 50%) are enabled, and as a matter of GTM policy, are supported to take up key leadership positions within the management committee.

The context:

According to the 2002 Census, 1,058 members of the Traveller community were living in Galway, of which 49% were between 0-16 years of age (this compares with 16% of the overall population) and just 1% were aged 65 years and older (compared with 8% of the overall population). The unemployment rate is almost 77%, and 60% have finished school with no education or primary education only. A census of Travellers and Traveller accommodation undertaken in late 2004 revealed that there are 340 families living in Galway City and estimated that, potentially, 118 families are in need of accommodation from the City Council[22]. A study undertaken by the (then) Western Health Board in 2002 found that as many as 12% of Travellers reported that they had some type of disability[23].

[22] Galway City Council (2005) *Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2005-2007*. p.4.
[23] GTM (2006) *Strategic Results Based Framework*. P.15.

Research carried out by GTM found that many Travellers reported experiencing racism and discrimination in Galway City in relation to public services, access to shops and social occasions and in employment and education.

Participation in policy arenas (see table)

GTM is engaged in statutory and agency-led policy arenas and is also heavily involved with many Traveller and community-sector policy initiatives. Participation by GTM in policy arenas is shared amongst staff (Traveller and settled).

Approach:

GTM's approach to participating in statutory and agency-led policy arenas consists of seeking to ensure that all work is carried out within an Equality Framework and that

- Travellers and Traveller interests are represented in relevant policy arenas
- Travellers are consulted on issues that affect their lives
- Traveller representatives are fully supported to engage effectively in those arenas
- The working methods of the policy arenas support real participation
- The proposals that come from the policy arena reflect the experiences of Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within Irish society.

This work poses an ongoing challenge, one which the GTM sees as integral to their work.

Fig. 4.1 Policy map – Galway Traveller Movement (July 2006)

Issue/area	City	
	Arena – statutory	Arena – non-statutory
Accommodation	• LTACC • Local inter-agency networks	
Equality		• Action for Equality Network
Health	• GTM & HSE working groups on midwifery, emotional/mental health, suicide	
City Development	• SIMs representation • Community Forum (and Steering Group of the Forum)	• CDP network on SIMs representation
Partnership		• Community Development sub-committee • Anti-racism advisory group • Employment and Enterprise sub-committee • Education sub-group
Other	• Maintained good relationships with many local and national politicians • Inter-agency linkages	

REGIONAL

Issue/area	Arena – statutory	Arena – non-statutory
Health	• HSE Traveller Health Unit[24] • Sub-group on accommodation (addresses relationship between environment and health), primary care and GPs, finance.	• Regional Traveller Health Network of Traveller groups
Violence Against Women	• RPC on Violence Against Women	• Representation from Regional Traveller Health Network • Regional CDP network on domestic violence
CDP Programme		• Regional network of CDPs • CDP Co-ordinator's network
Other		• ITM regional network of Traveller projects

NATIONAL

Issue/area	Arena – statutory	Arena – non-statutory
Health	• Traveller Health Strategy & National Traveller Health Advisory Committee	• Pavee Point National Traveller Health Network
CDP Programme	• Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	• Traveller CDPs network (facilitated by Pavee Point)
Other	• Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government	• Membership of national organisations incl. CWC, ITM, NTWF.

[24] There are 16 representatives on this committee – eight are Traveller representatives and eight are from the HSE. There are Traveller representatives on all of the sub-committees

4.3 Case-study Family Resource Centre - St. Brigid's Family & Community Centre, Waterford

Overview:

Founded in 1984, St. Brigid's deals with about 10,000 people per year through a range of activities that includes community development work with groups, work with the Traveller community, childcare and support services from crèche-age children through to teen years, counselling and the support of other groups such as GROW and Al-anon, as well as running two shops and hosting a citizen's information centre. Its stated aim is to combat poverty and disadvantage by improving the functioning of the family unit. It seeks to adopt an empowerment approach that respects the dignity of every person that uses its services.

Context:

Located in Waterford 'inner city', St. Brigid's geographic focus was agreed with RAPID and the area partnership in 2005. It recently received an 'improved cohesion' grant from the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to undertake a needs analysis of the inner city and develop a plan to address these with other relevant organisations (see map of policy arenas for details of mechanisms developed). Previously, no mechanism for community groups active in the area to convene existed.

Participation in policy arenas:

St. Brigid's is engaged in both statutory-led and sector-led policy arenas from local to local authority/city level, to regional and national level (see Figure 4.2. for further details). While staff take a lead role in engaging in these arenas, St. Brigid's has consciously sought to support the engagement of its voluntary management committee within policy arenas also.

Approach to policy work:

St. Brigid's actively engages in policy arenas within the FRC programme (regional and national forums of FRCs) and within Waterford city. It has adopted a number of strategies towards the latter

• Supporting the development of groups where none existed within the inner city area.

• Supporting the development of a forum of these groups to undertake the needs analysis of the inner city and develop the plan to address these.

• Engaging in policy arenas such as the RAPID AIT and the CDB SIMs committee to promote inclusive family support practice within a community development context.

Fig 4.2 St. Brigid's Family & Community Centre August 2006

	LOCAL	
Arena	**Structure**	**Example of some policy issues addressed**
Waterford Inner City Cohesion Process	• Network of groups and organisations within the inner city • A Steering Committee • An Executive Committee	• The agreed identification of needs within the inner city, the development of a plan to address these and the implementation of the plan
Waterford City Development Board	• Waterford Community Forum • Waterford SIMs Committee • Waterford City Development Board	
Waterford City Childcare Committee	• Waterford City Childcare Committee	• Development of childcare facility in the city.
Waterford City CDPs Network		
RAPID	• On RAPID Area Implementation Team	

REGIONAL		
Arena	**Structure**	**Example of some policy issues addressed**
Regional Forum of FRCs	• Staff member is currently secretary of the Regional Forum	• Preparation of contribution to submission by Family Support Agency to Oireachtas Committee on the Family. • Discussion on input to the strategic plan of the Family Support Agency • Discussion on future of the FRC programme within the forthcoming National Development Plan

NATIONAL		
Arena	**Structure**	**Example of some policy issues addressed**
National Forum of Family Resource Centres	• Staff members and management committee members participate • Sub-groups • FSA liaison group	• Presentation to Oireachtas Committee on the Family • Strategic Plan of the Family Support Agency • Role of the FRC programme within the forthcoming NDP • Strategic role of the National Forum into the future.
National Forum of Community Forums	• Staff member represented	

4.4 Case study Partnership – Wexford Area Partnership

Overview

The mission statement of Wexford Area Partnership is 'to help people who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing economic and/or social disadvantage, to improve their lives through united local action'. Established during the 'second round' of Partnerships in 1996, the Board of Directors brings representatives of the statutory sector, trades unions and employers, and the community and voluntary sector together. The Partnership prioritises its work to address needs of the following target groups including

- Long-term unemployed
- Disadvantaged women
- People with a disability
- Ethnic minorities
- Alienated young people
- Travelling community
- One parent families
- Disadvantaged men
- Early years
- Substance misusers
- Offenders/potential offenders
- Older people
- (People experiencing) family life crisis
- Homeless people
- Gays, lesbians and bisexuals
- Immigrant workers

It focuses its actions on nine geographic areas (including three designated RAPID areas) with profiles of disadvantage including poor economic and community infrastructure, high unemployment, high levels of early school-leaving, youth crime and substance misuse and low educational attainment. Through *integrated local development teams,* target groups can participate in decision-making and planning within their local community. *Wexford Area Community Team* acts as a collective voice of the disadvantaged geographic areas as well as ethnic minorities, Travellers, older people and people with a disability. The Partnership's actions, programmes and services are led by Steering Groups drawn from the target groups, the geographic communities and sectoral representatives of the Partnership and an annual Community Conference is held to review the work of the Partnership and explore new ways of addressing identified aspects of disadvantage.

As well as the LDSIP, Wexford Area Partnership also manages the Local Employment Service, the Cornmarket Project (supported by the Probation and Welfare Services), Konnecting.u (supported by the HSE), a Traveller Development Programme (multi-agency), a boat-building project for long-term unemployed men (multi-agency), RAPID Community Support Programme, Childcare Development Programme (through the County Childcare Programme), SONAS Asylum Seeker Programme (through EU Equal), a Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme (supported by the Department of Social & Family Affairs) and a Rural Transport Initiative.

The context[25]

Wexford Area Partnership hinterland contains the population of roughly a third of the total population of Co. Wexford. Figures from the 2002 Census illustrate growth in its population of 11% and an age dependency ratio of 52% - higher than the national ratio of 48%. 30% of all households with children are headed by single parents. Unemployment levels in urban Wexford at 11.5% (2004) are higher than county and national levels. 28% of all Wexford-located Travellers were living in temporary housing units.

Participation in policy arenas

As a partnership company, Wexford Area Partnership is a policy arena in its own right. Internally, its company structure and the composition of its Board of Directors and working groups and committees comprise of representatives of key stakeholders, both statutory and non-statutory, in addressing disadvantage.

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[25] Data for this section is derived from Wexford Area Partnership (2004) *Implementation Plan 2004-2006 and Mid-Term Review of Progress and Achievements 2000-2003.*

Fig. 4.3 Wexford Area Partnership – a policy arena
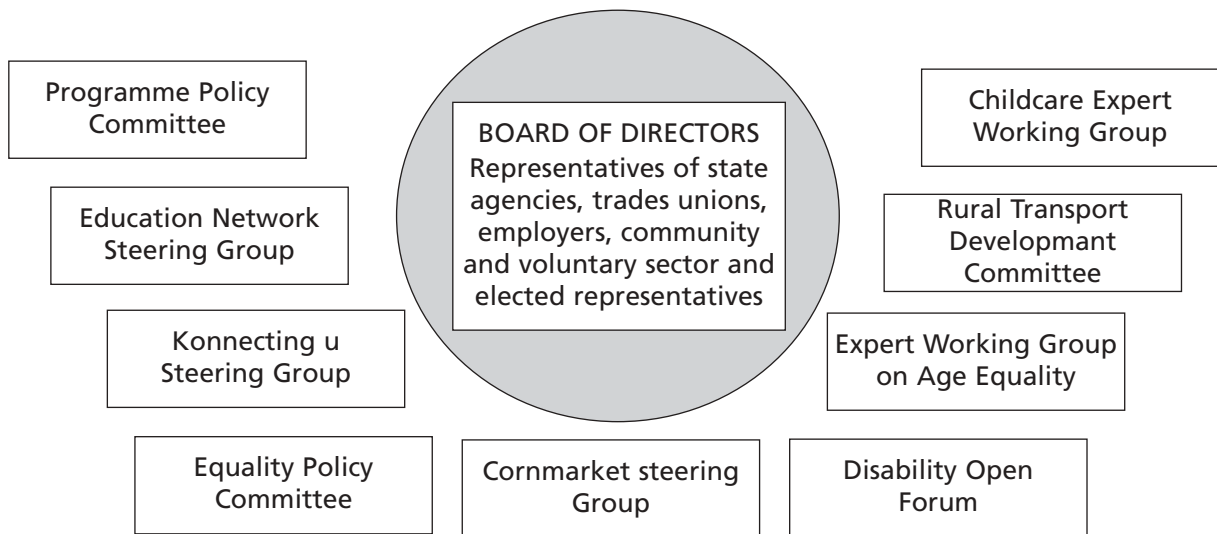
Externally, Wexford Area Partnership plays a key role in a number of issue-focused networks including Wexford Education Network, the Employment Guidance Network and Wexford Enterprise Network.

Policy arenas that the Partnership is engaged in include the Wexford County Development Board and its SIM Working Group, RAPID, Wexford Borough Council and Wexford County Childcare Committee.

In addition, Wexford Area Partnership has close involvement with a number of other local development agencies including, County Wexford Partnership, the County Enterprise Board, WORD (Leader).

Approach to policy work
Wexford Area Partnership adopts a three-pronged approach to policy work including
• Influencing policy through its collaboration and co-operation with other agencies and stakeholders on its own work. One example of this is where the merits of the Partnership's own Strategic Plan (2000-2006) have highlighted the need for such plans for other parts of the county.

The SIM group is now seeking to develop a social inclusion plan for another town in Co. Wexford.
• Proactively taking a policy approach to a specific issue. One example is where the Partnership commissioned a major piece of research on the needs of young people at risk in Wexford, published this and followed through to the establishment of a project 'Konnecting.u' supported by the Partnership and the HSE.
• Working in support of local communities (geographic areas or communities of interest) to develop policy perspectives on the issues which directly affect them and their lives and supporting them to pursue these issues. An example is the recent production of a community manifesto calling for a more equal society - 'Investing in Civil Society 2007-2013. The Needs of Communities in Wexford' (October 2005) for use in planning and development processes in Wexford.

4.5 Conclusions from the case-studies

There are a number of conclusions on the policy work and approach of the case-studies that are relevant to this research.

Clarity on approach and strategy to engaging in policy work in policy arenas

With the wide range of policy arenas and stakeholders in engaged in policy work, it is highly necessary for projects to be clear on what they want to achieve from their engagement in policy arenas. Participation is demanding of resources and a focus on objectives helps projects assess the efficacy of continued engagement in multiple arenas. For example, GTM have introduced a results-based management system which enables the project to more easily identify and measure achievements from participation.

Avail of programme opportunities to network on policy issues and propose policy agendas

Linking with other projects within the programme on policy issues plays a useful policy support function. This can include strategically organising on policy issues and planning representation on policy arenas to ensure that the issues can be raised across multiple arenas in a collective manner. For CDPs and FRCs, in a context of scarce resources, this can be a useful strategy but it is dependent on shared values, a shared vision and good communications and reporting.

Networking beyond the local

Engaging in policy arenas such as national organisations or mechanisms linked to the programmes can contribute much to a project's policy engagement. It can provide an opportunity to reflect on work undertaken, identify and develop policy messages, bring a local focus to national policy issues, provide an opportunity to hear about what is happening on those issues in other parts of the country and offer a means of informing local responses with knowledge of national policy frameworks.

The Regional Forum and National Forum of the FRCs, the Regional Traveller Health Network, ITM's regional network of Traveller CDPs as well as PLANET and the Community Partnerships Networks and membership of national organisations such as CWC, EAPN and others were all identified as important to the policy engagement of projects.

Building policy capacity within the sector

The strategy adopted by Wexford Area Partnership on building the capacity of the community sector in disadvantaged areas in Wexford resulting in the creation of Wexford Area Community Team, is an example of how the LDSIP can support and enhance the policy role of the community and voluntary sector. The launch of a number of policy documents by the Team on investing in civil society and in local planning is evidence of development of community capacity for agenda-setting policy work locally.

Section 5 | The practice of policy work – critical issues identified

5.1 Introduction

The previous sections of this report have mapped the policy work undertaken by projects within the three programmes that responded to the survey, described the difficulties they encounter and the sources of these, and highlighted ways to strengthen and support the anti-poverty work of projects into the future. This section offers further analysis of the nature of this work and reflects on a number of critical issues to anti-poverty policy engagement identified by the research participants (including the interviewees and case-study projects). Partnership working as a policy approach attracts much critical attention and receives further consideration in this section. Engaging in policy work is not risk-free and this is also further explored. The section concludes with a summary of the key challenges to be addressed in supporting projects to engage effectively in anti-poverty policy work into the future.

5.2 Analysis of policy engagement by CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships

From the contributions to the research[26], a number of conclusions about the policy work of CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships can be drawn.

Policy work is central to the work of projects and there is a high level of engagement across all three programmes

The vast majority (96%) of CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships had engaged in policy work over the period 2000-2006 and projects across all age categories had engaged.

Policy work is viewed as both central and critical to the work of projects across all three programmes.

[Policy] is some attempt to use the experience gained from ground work in community development to impact on structures, government departments and funding and how these are administered. [It's] how experience can contribute to better programmes and also be responsive to issues and difficulties. The positive side is how we use experience gained to improve things – the negative is when you run into difficulties.

'Policy work' is not a singular activity but is melded and merged throughout the work of the project.

Talking policy work can be difficult – it's not nice and neat – it's tied in to the work we do.

A range of issues across a range of arenas

Projects typically undertake policy-focused work on a range of issues, though the choice of issues can differ across the three programmes[27]. The implications of the spread of issues addressed within the programmes are worth considering further. Each of theses issues is discrete not only in terms of the implications for people in poverty but also in terms of what may constitute an anti-poverty response. The opportunities to address that issue in policy arenas and/or through policy mechanisms may be non-existent or vary widely. This situation can place demands on project personnel (and for CDPs and FRCs, on their voluntary boards of management) to be sufficiently *au fait* with the complexities of a number of areas if they are to effectively bring an anti-poverty agenda on that issue to various policy arenas.

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26 The survey, case-studies and contributions from the interviewees.
27 For example, only two issues – services and facilities and inter-cultural and anti-racism work – figure across the five most frequently cited issues for each programme.

Projects also engage in many policy arenas from local to national and beyond. This includes state-led arenas such as CDB structures and community forums, and independently organised arenas such as through engagement with national organisations, regional networks and so on. What is quite striking about this engagement is that it is multi-level – the vast majority of projects across all three programmes indicate that they are involved in policy arenas and mechanisms at three or more levels.

While projects from all three programmes engage in arenas in common, such as County Childcare Committees and County Development Board structures, engagement can differ depending on the programme. For example, CDPs and FRCs engage in Partnership company structures as a policy arena, and Partnerships appear to be more involved in inter-agency steering groups/networks on service delivery. Another difference lies in the internal policy mechanisms within each programme. With the LDSIP and the FRC programme, the two Partnerships Networks and the FRC National Forum are identified as independent, programme-linked policy mechanisms. The CDP programme has one policy mechanism with representation from CDPs – the National Advisory Committee.

Figure 5.1 gives an overview of the various policy spaces and highlights the relationship between these.

State-organised and –led policy arenas include such arenas as Drugs Task Forces, Community Forums, County Development Board structures and Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees.

Figure 5.1 Map of policy spaces
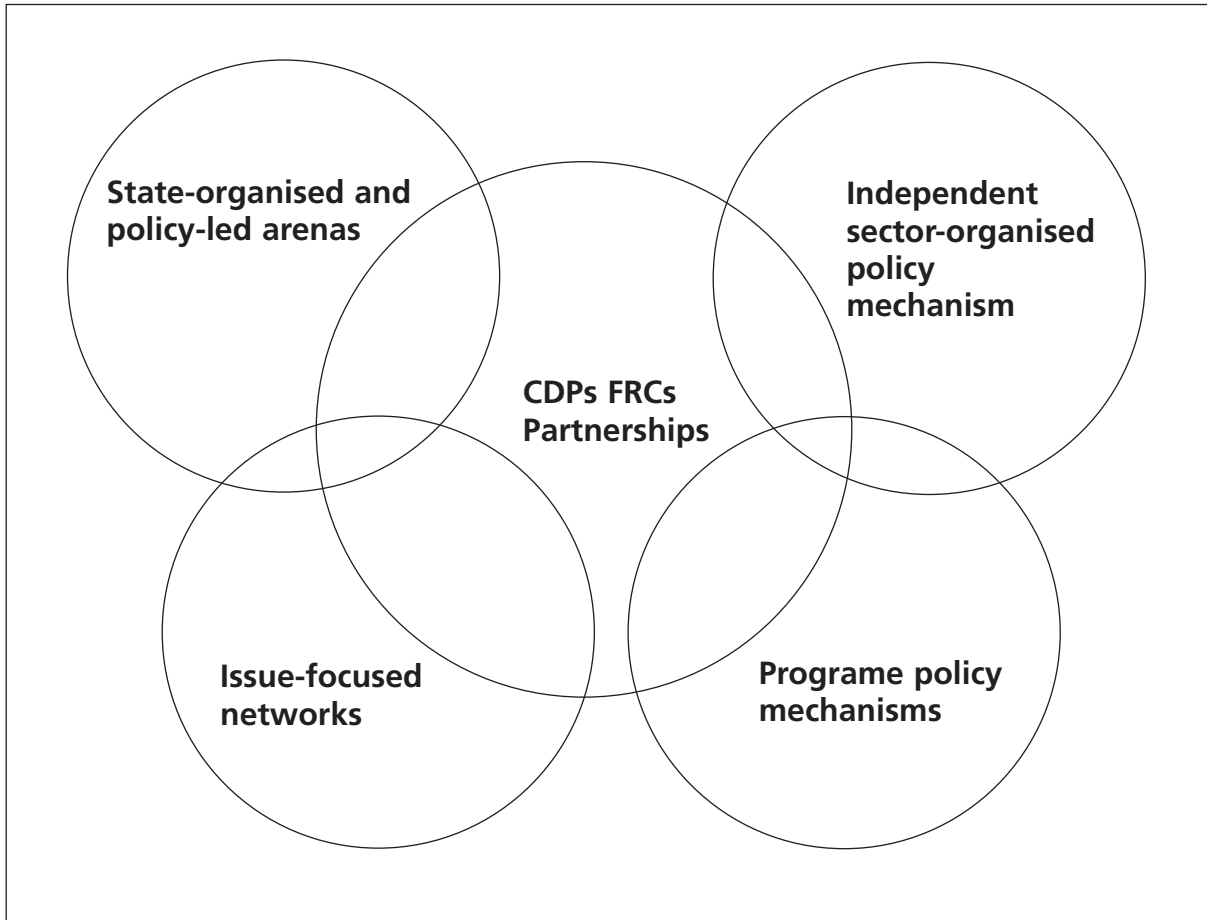
Issue-focused networks – these can include state-organised committees, such as an HSE committee on suicide, disability and so on; policy arena-focused mechanisms, like anti-poverty platforms within community forums; and issue-focused networks on such areas as the Traveller community, the elderly, disability and so on. These may or may not include representatives of the State, community groups and voluntary organisations.

Programme policy mechanisms – this includes internal programme policy mechanisms. For the FRC programme, it includes the National Forum. For the LDSIP, it includes the two Partnerships Networks and Pobal working groups. For the CDP programme, it includes the National Advisory Committee, which encompasses representation from CDPs within its membership[28].

Independent sector-organised policy mechanisms – these constitute mechanisms that the community sector itself has organised to engage in policy work. It includes independent networks that can exist at many levels and national organisations independent of the programmes and the policy arenas.

In addition, policy arenas and responses can differ widely on anti-poverty issues around the country. For example, some community forums may have an equality or anti-poverty platform or network of community groups that specifically tracks and supports that work within local authority and CDB structures. Another community forum may have issue-focused sub-groups with little or no prominence given to an anti-poverty focus within these. One area may have an HSE-led initiative on suicide where another area may have an HSE-led initiative on the needs of carers. This diversity of policy opportunities, depending as it does on the geographic area, the initiative of an agency or network or other factors, implies that any national policy support initiative must recognise and address regional, county and local variances.

Calls to strengthen internal programme policy mechanisms

Across all three programmes, research participants called for strengthened policy mechanisms within each of the programmes. For FRCs, the National Forum is expected to play a key role as an independent programme voice for projects on policy arenas at national level, and as a policy mechanism in its own right. Undertaking this role, building the policy capacity of FRCs to engage within and outside of the National Forum will take resources to develop and implement that strategy.

For CDPs, the perceived weakness of the current programme structure from a policy perspective and lukewarm commitment to policy development and engagement has been repeatedly identified as an area of concern.

> *Whatever push there is to do policy work is coming from regional level (or individual projects).*

> *There is an expectation that CDPs will do policy work but there's no national commitment to do that work.*

> *A lot may not like the idea of a programme (voice). It's important that a project is immediately linked to an area. But there's not programme value, no added clout that projects can get from being part of a programme. We're not maximising that clout.*

For the LDSIP, Partnerships themselves are acknowledged as policy mechanisms in their own right.

> *We influence social policy by the way we do things…we would have strong relationships with [state agencies] and policy influence tends to come from bilateral relationships and partners…we developed a policy perspective and went to the state agencies and persuaded them to come behind*

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28 This does not mean that locally or regionally, CDPs do not engage in policy work on issues of concern as CDPs. However, currently, no independent *programme* policy mechanism exists where CDPS can reflect on their work and contribute that analysis to policy arenas.

us. As you do the work, then the work starts talking back to the State…Our job is both proactive and supportive.

Pobal and the two partnership networks are identified as programme policy mechanisms and, during a period of transition at many levels, there are clear calls for anti-poverty and social inclusion policy role of Partnerships and Pobal to be maintained and further strengthened[29].

That policy making focus must be ring-fenced and retained at local and national levels.

Strong convergence on the type of policy activities undertaken

The survey results indicate a high level of convergence on the range of policy activities undertaken by projects across the three programmes with networking, undertaking joint work on positions and strategies and participating in policy arenas being undertaken by the vast majority of respondents. This has a number of implications, particularly in relation to resources.

All of the main identified policy activities – and especially the three highlighted above – are very labour intensive. Having, as they do, relationship-building as a key constituent, objective and an outcome, they demand sustained investment to reap benefits on all three fronts. CDPs and FRCs, in particular, may suffer the strain of attempting to meet what can – unfortunately - become competing demands of locally based community work and policy engagement as both are labour-intensive exercises demanding sustained personal engagement.

Institutionally you have CDBs, SIMs, RAPID AITs, Childcare Committees, cohesion processes – you'd wonder where are the resources at local level – there's no acknowledgement that even though you're expected to respond, you need resources to do that.

One interesting comment highlighted how the increased opportunities to engage in local policy arenas had diminished the potential to contribute to national policy-focused work.

There's a huge resource issue for projects – the amount and level of engagement that's needed. It's taken from the national involvement and possibly weakened the national policy role.

One of the main policy activities - participation in policy arenas – attracted much attention by contributors to this research. Working in partnership with the State, in state-led policy arenas, is now a key form of policy activity, and partnership processes therein are critical to successful policy engagement. Partnership working attracted a lot of critical attention and reflection by contributors to this research: this form of policy activity will be explored later in this section of the report.

Level and types of difficulties encountered and responses to these

Policy work is acknowledged as challenging for many projects working at local level.

Often people don't see the connection between what they're doing – the local-national-EU. They need help to see its relevance. That's a struggle – they don't often have the time and moving from project to policy, it can be difficult to see the relevance of, say the NAP social inclusion.

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29 ADM had a number of policy-focused arenas in which Partnerships engaged that were perceived to be helpful from a policy perspective and that have not been re-activated/re-constituted as yet within Pobal.

One of the main findings of this research is the high level of difficulty reported in undertaking policy work across all the three programmes[30]. Significantly, a lack of resources is cited as one of the main sources of difficulty. This theme – a lack of adequate resources – consistently emerges as an underlying problem for the projects throughout the research. It was also cited as the main reason why many of the projects were unable to engage in available policy opportunities over the period 2000-2006[31]. This is important. Policy work is now a key part of the work of projects across all three programmes and, with the increase in policy opportunities and policy arenas at many levels, projects wish to maximise these opportunities and, indeed, are expected by the State to engage. As a labour-intensive activity, this aspect of projects' and programmes' work needs to be recognised, supported and adequately resourced by the relevant government departments and agencies with responsibility for the three programmes.

Another area of 'difficulty' lies in the high proportion of projects across the three programmes that identified policy learning and support needs in relation to knowledge of the policy system and ways of influencing it and also, for FRCs, on identifying a policy focus to their work and developing policy responses. This finding is not surprising when a number of contextual considerations are taken on board. As highlighted earlier, projects undertake policy-focused work on a range of issues, in multiple arenas using a variety of approaches. Each of these issues is discrete, not only in how it impacts on and affects people in poverty but also in terms of what may constitute an appropriate anti-poverty response. The broader policy context in which that issue may (or may not) be addressed is likely to differ significantly, depending on the geographic area or issue in question. This diversity alone would pose significant challenges to projects' personnel (and for FRCs and CDPs, their

voluntary boards of management) to develop an anti-poverty agenda on an issue that would be appropriate to the policy context at local and other levels.

Another factor is the challenge of approaching local issues from a policy perspective and developing ways of documenting and analysing project experiences in a way that speaks to the policy system.

> *The key challenge is documenting evidence – they (projects) can have most impact when they say it's arising from what they do or see. Monitoring needs to be of a high quality – there's a lot of scope for …. strengthening evidence and monitoring.*

> *They (project) might identify issues but don't have the capacity to produce documentation on it.*

One interviewee had an interesting insight specifically on this.

> *Some [projects] would say they lack knowledge of the political system and policy making process – that's interesting knowledge to have but it's not going to solve problems. The problem is to identify lessons, document these and to build up arguments for change.*

Staying abreast of changing policy developments, engaging effectively in policy arenas, offering well-presented, sound arguments for change based on evidence and analysis within these arenas, while networking and building alliances as part of one's strategy in influencing positive change demand a range of competencies and skills in addition to the 'traditional' skills required for community development. These high demands raise important questions about the training and development of project personnel and how to impart the 'new' skill sets required to meet the challenges of effectively engaging in policy work, while

[30] 80% of CDPs and FRCs and 100% of Partnerships reported encountering difficulties in undertaking policy work over the period 2000-2006.
[31] See section 3.6.

also undertaking community development work. While this issue is of relevance to the various academic and training institutions of community development workers around the country, from the point of view of this research, it is of particular relevance to those bodies identified by projects within the three programmes as having a support and information role for them on policy.

The fact that such a high proportion of projects across all three programmes identified learning and support needs regarding policy work as a difficulty must be acknowledged and addressed by the relevant agencies and departments in planning and implementing support strategies for the programmes into the future. As these have responsibility for the implementation and development of the programmes into the future, prime responsibility for ensuring these needs are addressed rests with these agencies and departments. However, an important factor for consideration in the development and implementation of these support strategies is the role played by identified national organisations and by some statutory agencies such as Combat Poverty and the Equality Authority.

Re. the former, national organisations engaged in anti-poverty work play a number of roles in relation to CDPs, FRCs and Partnerships which are significant to their policy work. These include

• As a space where members and non-members can network on issues of common interest and concern, share learning and build confidence in policy engagement.

> *Bringing policy issues to the table is quite daunting. [Many] might not feel confident about bringing some 'high-falutin' something' to the table. There's a help in being around people who have been around a bit longer. People are so new at it.*

• As a resource to members, supporting their own work through analyses and information.

> *I can feel quite isolated, there are only two (projects) in the county. Influencing policy for me would be around getting support for anti-poverty work like with the SIM committee – anti-poverty work is not high on their agenda. I'm still not sure what I need to be doing in order to bring across my point. I'm not in a RAPID area so we're at a disadvantage there in that there isn't a way where anti-poverty groups get together.*

• As an independent policy development and representative mechanism on key issues and aspects of poverty and social exclusion, contributing inputs to policy arenas and issues.

The significance of these organisations to the policy work of projects within all three programmes is highlighted in Section 3.9 of this report and in the map of policy mechanisms that projects engaged with. A number of organisations were repeatedly identified including the Community Workers Co-op, the European Anti-Poverty Network, the National Women's Council, the Irish Traveller Movement, the Partnerships' networks (for the LDSIP) and others.

> *National organisations working at local level – it's key they do that, bring policy together and support them [projects] to work through issues.*

These roles are recognised by many contributors to this research and also in separate commissioned studies[32]. Many contributors to this research perceived that national organisations lacked adequate resources to undertake these roles comprehensively.

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[32] This role has also been recognised in independent evaluations undertaken as part of two separate programmes – see Walsh, K. (2003) and Fitzpatrick Associates (1997).

When you try and do a piece of work on policy, you don't have those resources. You need national organisations (for this) and for ongoing support. Only a few organisations can do that – [but their] funding is temporary. No resources are going in to maintain the work. Its usefulness is minimised. In some areas there's nothing. It needs resourcing and support.

As mentioned earlier, publications and information from statutory bodies such as Combat Poverty, the Equality Authority, the National Disability Authority, Comhairle and NCCRI as well as research grants from Combat Poverty and the Equality Authority were identified as important supports. It is advisable that the roles and contributions from both these non-programme sources be recognised, supported and continued within the policy support strategies for the three programmes.

Another difficulty highlighted by CDPs and FRCs in engaging in policy work lay with the challenge of supporting and engaging voluntary management committees on policy work.

Volunteers find it difficult to input into these networks or fora – there's already such a huge responsibility re. getting their own projects running and it's hard to get the time. Volunteers are being asked to do so much already.

We try to keep sight of the policy work. But the Board doesn't always 'get' me attending meetings versus meeting the local authority about the bins in the area. There's a tension between policy work with a big 'P' and policy work with a small 'p'.

5.3 Developments in policy engagement since 2000

A number of developments or trends in policy engagement were identified during this research. Partnership working is by far the most frequently cited and debated form of policy engagement. Its 'rise and rise' within anti-poverty social policy, in particular, is a significant development that merits further attention and analysis beyond the parameters of this research. However a number of developments or trends within 'partnership policy' were identified over the research period (2000-2006).

There is a perceived reduction in the opportunity to engage in relevant anti-poverty arenas at national level, with consequences for local work as well.

The opportunities for consultation are narrowing to just social partnership. For us to find opportunities to influence is narrowing. People aren't asked. For example the new NDP and the National Reform Programme – they're not asked. If you enquired, you were told you could [make a submission], but there's a very small number of local groups that would do that. There's a shift to receiving information, it might go to social partnership and it might not move beyond that. Those involved in social partnership don't see it in their role to consult outside themselves. For example, there's two regional NDP meetings to take place in the South & East and the BMW. It's only open to the social partners, regional assemblies and local authorities. The community and voluntary sector is a minority voice in the consultation.

There is a perceived change to the approaches to partnership working with consequent changes to the roles of the community and voluntary sector.

The door isn't as open as it was five years ago. With the original NAPS, and equality legislation and Freedom of Information (Act), the State created a lot of space at the end of the nineties. This is being slowly clawed back. The approach now is there will be consultation and then they'll tell us what they've done.

There is also a perceived change to the strategy of the State to partnership working as a process and to already established partnership arenas. A number of instances were cited where these were unilaterally changed by the State resulting in inconsistent and sometimes contradictory messages.

What happens is that you end up with a few unappointed reps (selected by the State) who have influence far beyond their membership and it tends to be the softer option is gone for.

Traveller CDPs are facing a big thing at the moment – the High Level Officials process has huge implications on how the sector will be allowed to engage in policy.

A further trend relates to the advocacy role of projects within partnership working – many perceive that this role is increasingly being implicitly circumscribed and directed more towards service provision and implementation, with their value perceived to be increasingly linked to that role.

There's a perception that you're only of value if you're providing a service – and this is also true at national level.

There's more pressure from funders to provide services, not to engage in lobbying and activism. They see that community development is about service provision – it's a message from the government that's getting stronger all the time.

The right to dissent has been eroded.

However, other developments were also noted. The focus on 'evidence-based policy making' was highlighted as being somewhat problematic in that it elevated and oriented policy towards what can be measured and what 'is' over what might be and, from a human-rights approach, what should be.

How to use the national and international human rights mechanisms within policy. Strengthen (projects) to use them. We need to put standards into this work

A further development deemed to be significant was the fact that Ireland is now a very wealthy country and that raising and addressing poverty within this environment is now more difficult than over a decade ago.

We're in a new context – we're in a very wealthy and very unequal country – we need a new conceptual analysis on social inclusion and give people that.

5.4 The experience of partnership

Partnership working was by far the most frequently cited and debated form of policy engagement relevant to anti-poverty policy work identified in this research. Partnership policy work is not without its complications and though the bulk of participants' comments related to concerns and difficulties encountered over the research period, some also highlighted positive aspects. The following paragraphs give an overview of the range of issues identified by research participants that relate to the broader structural context within which partnership operates, the process of partnership itself, and what people see as the outcomes of partnership from an anti-poverty context.

5.4.1 Structural influences

The highly centralised nature of the policy system was repeatedly identified as both a fact to be acknowledged in understanding how decisions are made but also a source of frustration..

There is a structural problem in policy (making)…there's no real mechanism to feed bottom up into policy. There's a block in the way the State has organised that. The State is organised in a top down way, there's little flexibility at local level. You're pushing a trickle of water against a flood coming down. For example with Local Authorities funding – it's mainly from above, it's tagged, there's very little flexibility.

How much of a role are these structures having? There hasn't been any devolved control to these structures. People are sitting on them and they're not sure what the mandate is – they can't make a decision because they have to go back to someone else e.g. CDBs and NAPS. There are a number of things they can do something about but there are quite a few that they can't do anything about e.g. levels of social welfare.

The diversity within and across departments and statutory agencies, their remits and their structures was also identified as significant, both to the practice of policy and potential to transfer learning across departments and agencies and between different levels.

The Departments are very different. With the Department of Social Welfare (sic), senior staff are resourced on the ground. They have more experience …to feed in….to the policy system. It's different with Enterprise, Trade and Employment – FAS and the LES are agencies at one remove.

Some partnership arenas are perceived to be more effective in terms of progress on anti-poverty issues than others.

Traveller projects would have a very good relationship with the health board Primary Health Care – they've (both) have put a lot of energy into engaging. But a lot (of projects) have started to pull back from the Better Local Government process. A lot of areas like the Community Forum and SPCs are not functioning (from an anti-poverty perspective). There's a lack of uniformity. One of the problems is that it can depend on the individuals like the Director of C&E and it depends on where the community sector is at to get a strong anti-poverty voice in the community forum.

Another factor identified was the desirability of all partners to have knowledge and understanding of each other's culture, working approaches and the issues they address. When these are absent, difficulties can arise.

Officials can be handed these issues with no background on it. The attitude was that 'we're the people that will make the decision – so what about the experience on the ground or elsewhere'.

5.4.2 The processes of partnership

Another aspect of partnership working that received much attention included those related to the relationship of partnership - decision-making, modalities and dynamics of partnership.

Much frustration was expressed at instances where a policy existed but was not implemented or was unreasonably slow in being implemented or was implemented in a significantly different manner to what had been intended. Some felt that transparency in decision-making could be improved if accountability practices were enhanced.

There is a lack of transparency on how policy is made – there's no feedback on why a submission was ignored and why lessons weren't learned. There should be some forum where policymakers would say 'we're not doing this and why' – it's a charade to give the illusion that there's consultation.

Roles and approaches of the different stakeholders and in particular from the various government departments and state agencies were also highlighted.

You're bringing key players on those places where there's a high value on social inclusion but they act differently in other places. [There is a need] to develop a real framework for multi-sectoral disciplinary space for everyone to maintain their integrity.

It depends on the personnel – you can do all the right things with some personnel and there's no change whatsoever, whereas others will work with you.

Departments are mindful of each other and their own status versus the status of other departments. At local level, there can be more openness. [Often] it's at national level the blocks are.

Clarity on who has the power and who can make decisions is crucial.

Most of the structures are based on a partnership contract – there's validity given to consultation and participation but the one you come up against is, is [whether] that [work is] part of decision-making or is it simply pieces of work which may or may not be taken on board by decision-makers.

Another area highlighted in a number of instances is what is described as the 'culture' of partnership and how significant this is to the extent to which an anti-poverty approach will be recognised and addressed within a policy arena.

It can be difficult to bring a social inclusion agenda. Our responsibility is to bring a social inclusion angle [to a policy arena] – how to get that considered is a major challenge. Culturally, there's a 'universal mandate', not specifically a social inclusion mandate. That's always a major force or dynamic – "We should look at all the people here, not just the socially excluded". If we weren't there, the force would be drawn towards the centre ground all the time.

When we have found an important issue – the most difficult task is to bring it to the attention of policy makers.

The modalities of a partnership arena can also be significant to projects' engagement, and especially so to supporting the participation of representatives of disadvantaged groups and communities.

Sometimes the space can be hostile – explicitly and implicitly. Literacy and language. No matter how well behaved the committee is, the way the committee is structured and organised can be a huge barrier.

Language, jargon and the environment is not friendly. It's not enough to issue guidelines about joining the CDB or X working group. [Voluntary reps] get lost and they walk away. We gave [person] support but after two months they wouldn't go back. The structures hadn't the capacity to deal with a voluntary member of a management committee coming forward. They've got it wrong. The story of his experience spreads and it feeds more into "we're not allowed in there" and "that's not for us".

It depends on the partnership – if there's good communications and relationships with the agencies, the outcomes will be valuable

outcomes. It it's a healthy space and you can challenge e.g. the Traveller Health Strategy – how the regional THUs engage and looking at Traveller representation on committees that have an opportunity to influence decisions – that's good. In others, the same commitment has not been given to developing real partnership relationships – (they have) a negligible impact on progressing activities and in having real outcomes.

Partnership is one way in which community groups and community representatives engage with the State. Aside from the tensions which partnership working brings, tension can also arise in other ways. There can sometimes be uneasy relationships between representative democracy (elected representatives) and participatory democracy (community organisations), and this is acknowledged as part of the landscape in which projects must operate.

Some of the local politicians and local authority staff would say what are you getting involved in this stuff for – we're the ones that have to vote on the plan

However, research participants also identified occasions when they engaged directly with the political system – sometimes as part of a strategy on an issue that included a partnership approach, sometimes separately.

We've got very good political support – we've worked with local politicians, brought them out to see sites and discuss what we wanted to achieve and liaised between meetings. The political support is fantastic and their understanding of the issues is good.

One quite telling aspect of the information offered by respondents was how few – just one project, in fact – identified the policy arena(s) they engaged in as a support. This fact implies that improving the accessibility of these arenas to community sector involvement would do much to enhance their effectiveness. This will be discussed further in the sections below.

5.4.3 The outcomes of partnership

If partnership working is viewed as a progressive means to desirable outcomes from an anti-poverty perspective, many have questioned its efficiency and effectiveness.

There appeared to be more opportunities at the beginning – it didn't work out like it was envisaged by the community sector. It was disappointing and frustrating from their side. It depended on many things – the level of community capacity, the local authority area you were in. It is very mixed. The opportunities that people felt were there didn't work out that way. One of the worst features was the SPCs. The council was going in with its own policy and the sector found it hard to impact. Outcomes? I can't thank of one (as opposed to outputs). I'm hard pressed to think of one.

You question the effectiveness of trying to be everywhere – we have to be strategic with our time. What are the results for the community? Can we see and measure the achievements?

The perceived lack of tangible outcomes, together with the need to be strategic in the nature of engagement within the context of scarce resources, sends a strong message to the State that the nature of partnership working and models of partnership adopted need to be revised and improved to re-invigorate commitment and demonstrate effectiveness as an approach and mechanism to address poverty.

5.5 The risks and benefits of engaging in policy work

Projects engage in policy work because they identify issues that need to be addressed and set about trying to influence decision-making on those issues. But it is not entirely a risk-free business. Already we have seen how the processes of partnership can be demanding and frustrating and can lead to negative experiences both for the projects and their participants. Projects have also raised the 'opportunity cost' of engagement arising from partnership working in state-led policy arenas within a context of scarce resources. But there may be other consequences too.

One of the difficulties in engaging in policy work (issue) – if that's winnable, there's huge impacts for the wider area. If we can sell that, there's huge capacity re. other issues. If we lose, there are other impacts and that needs to be managed. Because a lot of policy work is a win/lose scene, some projects stay away from it "We'd never do that, if it went belly up, the project would be finished".

Because policy work is political, all THAT environment must be considered. There's that fear – you don't bite the hand that feeds you. It can be beneficial – get local politicians, town managers, CEOs of CDBs on your side – or off your side. It's risky. The area can be demonised.

However, the benefits include enhanced profiles and working relationships with relevant others, as well as tangible results from which further opportunities for progress can be created down the line.

[The endorsement process] ….also had a good outcome. It heightened their [CDPs] profile with the CDBs – many of them hadn't heard of the CDPs or their work before. Most of the Boards were very impressed with what's been seen.

We've a better working relationship with some officials. We're now trying to develop a Tenant Participation Strategy appropriate with the Traveller community within the Traveller Accommodation Plan. We're working with individuals within the local authority that will change their training and how they engage with Travellers on the management of accommodation….We got things, in that Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority group.

It is clear that projects, programmes and others have a well-developed analysis of the opportunities and advantages, challenges and pitfalls to engaging in partnership working with the state on policy arenas. This analysis and reflection derives from lengthy engagement with the state on many policy arenas and offers clear signposts on the improvements that need to be made to the structures and processes of partnership policy arenas towards delivering meaningful outcomes from an anti-poverty perspective.

5.4 Conclusion

The level and nature of contemporary policy engagement in the current policy landscape demands further resources to projects at local level if available policy opportunities are to be fully exploited. In addition, there are clear calls for all three programmes to develop and strengthen programme policy mechanisms to maximise the opportunities for policy contribution from a programme perspective. Difficulties have been identified, not only in the level of resources available to undertake policy work, but also in information, skills and support on policy issues and arenas. Given the diversity in issues and approaches across the three programmes, as well as the diversity within the policy landscape itself, it is advisable that these are addressed by the agencies and Departments responsible for the

programmes in enhanced programme support strategies. However, the support and representation role of national organisations and the information and resources roles of agencies such as Combat Poverty and the Equality Authority must also be acknowledged.

Policy arenas in which projects from all three programmes engage in policy work can be described as diverse at best, and perhaps incoherent and at times contradictory at worst. These arenas are consistently dynamic and constantly changing, sometimes in unpredictable and unforeseeable ways. The existence of these incoherencies and inconsistencies means that even where national policy frameworks exist, policy strategies and solutions are frequently invented at local and regional level and it might indeed be said that policy making in this type of context can often feel as though it is being 'made up as you go along'. Partnership working with the State is the main approach across these arenas, and it is clear that a complex mix of forces and circumstances shapes partnership and affects its potential to deliver real outcomes on addressing poverty. This diversity has implications for approaches to policy learning and support initiatives, as it implies that an overly technocratic approach to policy may not necessarily be the most effective.

The following section identifies a number of recommendations and proposals towards addressing the issues identified.

Section 6 | Recommendations

This section contains a number of recommendations developed from consideration of the findings of the research on the nature of policy work undertaken by FRCs, CDPs and Partnerships and policy support and learning needs therein and findings in relation to policy arenas and policy making. These recommendations have been informed by the Terms of Reference of the research and the objective of 'Having Your Say' -

> *To initiate and support work that enables people experiencing poverty, their representatives or organisations that support them to engage in the policy system.*

The recommendations proposed also take into account the respective roles and responsibilities of –

• The relevant programme management agencies and departments and current programme support mechanisms
• The relevant programme policy mechanisms, internal to the programme (such as departmental and agency mechanisms) and linked to the programme (such as the National Forum of FRCs, the Community Partnerships Network and PLANET).
• Combat Poverty, whose legislative brief includes the promotion of measures to overcome poverty; the identification of new policies and programmes for the purpose of overcoming poverty; fostering and assisting these; and establishing and maintaining contact with Departments, statutory and other bodies[33].
• National organisations identified within the research as having a policy and support role to the three programmes and having a policy role in their own right.

Two other developments of significance to the recommendations are the ending of the current National Development Plan at the end of this year (2006) and the preparations for a new Plan at the time of writing. It is highly desirable that the public policy roles of the three programmes are strengthened and enhanced in the forthcoming National Development Plan.

The current national social partnership agreement 'Towards 2016' not only contains a commitment to the maintenance and expansion of partnership structures locally, but also to 'deepen the partnership between statutory bodies and voluntary and community organisations'. It states that 'The Government will engage with the sector in relation to future frameworks to support this relationship[34]'. This highlights the importance and necessity of the community and voluntary sector devoting attention to partnership working with the State, especially in policy making.

The recommendations also take into account the complexity of the environment in which the projects operate and their key roles as implementation agents for many of the programmes addressing poverty and disadvantage, equality and social inclusion that are delivered by a range of government departments and agencies.

The following paragraphs detail the recommendations designed to address the main findings. One set of recommendations speaks to the lead agencies and departments of the programmes studied in this research. Another set speaks to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The final set speaks to the Combat Poverty Agency.

The following recommendations speak to the lead departments and agencies of the FRC, CDP and the LDSIP programmes:
Policy work is a central and widely undertaken programme activity across all of the three programmes studied.

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33 See Combat Poverty Agency Act (1986) sections 4. (1) (a) and (d) and sections 4. (2) (b) and (e)
34 Department of the Taoiseach (2006: 75-76).

However, as an activity it is stymied by a lack of recognition and resources and weak programme policy mechanisms. Its potential to contribute to meaningful outcomes to effectively address poverty is enormous and its impact as a project and programme activity could be significantly increased by the direction of targeted resources and support to build capacity, allied with the development of strong programme policy mechanisms. The projects, the programmes, the agencies and the departments have much potential to contribute synergistically to anti-poverty policy making at all levels.

Therefore, it is recommended that

1. Anti-poverty policy work by projects within the three programmes is recognised as a distinct project and programme activity and included as such in relevant programme guidelines and complements. As an activity, it needs adequate targeted resources into the forthcoming phases of the programmes' development.

2. Policy support and learning needs should be recognised as a distinct area of requirement within programme support strategies, taking account of the identified skill set and knowledge areas required to work effectively within the current policy landscape. Responses appropriate to the objectives, role and priorities of each programme need to be developed, and it needs to be ensured that policy support mechanisms are adequate to this task. These supports need to be monitored and reviewed at regular intervals to facilitate progressive development of policy capacity and to ensure relevance in an ever-changing policy environment.

3. Internal programme policy mechanisms within all three programmes need to be strengthened and enhanced to maximise the policy value of the programmes. This will involve a twin approach –

- Continued development of those programme mechanisms that facilitate projects to reflect and analyse their experiences and translate these into policy messages for the lead agencies and departments.
- Strengthened internal policy analysis mechanisms within the lead agencies and departments to refine these policy messages and deliver these to appropriate departmental and other policy arenas on poverty.

There is further reason to undertake this approach beyond addressing the project and programme needs. There are many different programmes and initiatives to address aspects of social exclusion currently being undertaken by different government departments and agencies. The adoption of a learning approach to a heightened focus on the policy role and potential of the CDP, FRC and LDSIP programmes over the forthcoming phase of programmes' development in the NDP has significance for these other programmes as well. Many of these programmes have an objective that includes recognising policy lessons or influencing policy development. However, doing so is recognised as quite challenging and this aspect of programmes has been recognised as weak in the past.

This initiative, focusing as it does on building the policy capacity of the implementing projects, while strengthening programme policy mechanisms has much potential to describe and demonstrate to other departments and agencies ways of maximising the policy potential through some key shifts in programme priority and programme implementation. Doing this effectively necessitates analysing what works and recording reasons why and the existence of some mechanism for the subsequent transfer of that learning to others. However, with a little commitment, some creative thinking and working collaboratively, the agencies and

departments responsible for these three programmes could take a lead in developing new ways of implementing programmes to address social exclusion that depart from the prevalent 'top-down, data-up' model.

Therefore an additional recommendation is

4. It is strongly recommended that the relevant agencies and departments include this additional 'learning added-value' component to the programme approach to policy.

The following recommendation speaks to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs:

1. Maintain and enhance the anti-poverty policy role of national organisations
A number of independent national organisations were identified in this research that play positive and unique roles in supporting the policy work projects working locally on poverty issues and that also contribute a strong policy voice on poverty at national level. These roles have been recognised in other commissioned research[35] and in reports of consultations on major anti-poverty policy initiatives[36]. This research highlights that though this work is recognised as valuable, current resources are not adequate to meet the needs identified.

A review of all funding schemes under the White Paper is currently being undertaken, and information is not yet available on whether funding to support anti-poverty policy work will be included in future funding schemes. Available information indicates that new schemes will be advertised towards the end of this year. It is highly advisable that funding to support anti-poverty policy work of national organisations be continued in future funding schemes.

The following recommendations speak to the Combat Poverty Agency:

1. Targeted initiative at improved partnership working.
Partnership working with the state in policy arenas has been described in both favourable and unfavourable terms, and the weaknesses within partnership working have been recognised elsewhere[37]. The level and nature of difficulties encountered within the partnership policy environment necessitate a significant high-level response. It is recommended that Combat Poverty takes a lead role to address this area and facilitate a response to improve partnership working in anti-poverty policy arenas. Combat Poverty should develop and progress a targeted initiative to improve the structures, processes and outcomes of partnership working with the State in state-led policy arenas that address poverty issues.

This initiative can build on and be informed by other actions undertaken as part of the 'Having Your Say' programme, specifically under Objective IV 'Establish and implement a model code of practice on policy dialogue and participation between Combat Poverty and anti-poverty community and voluntary groups' and on previous work undertaken by other national organisations[38].

The approach to this initiative should model good partnership practice and work with interested national organisations, programme bodies, as well as relevant Departments and agencies[39] to develop a multi-stage plan.

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[35] See Walsh (2003) and Fitzpatrick Associates (1997) as mentioned earlier.
[36] Office for Social Inclusion (2006) *Report on the Consultation for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2006-2008)*. P.21.The report notes that the majority of written submissions received in response to the Office for Social Inclusion's call for submissions on the preparation of NAPS (2006-2008) were from national organisations and networks. This is a similar situation regarding the origin of submissions received from the consultation process to the earlier NAPS (2003-2005).
[37] In its publication '*The Developmental Welfare State',* NESDO point out a number of weaknesses in the thinking and processes of social policy. These include weak implementation strategies which have led to 'process fatigue' (p. 197-198).
[38] The Community Workers' Co-op, for example has undertaken a number of projects on participation in decision-making and produced publications such as *Strengthening Our Voice – A Guide for Community Sector participation in local decision-making* (2001) and *Strategies for Social Partnership* (2000).
[39] Key actors here may include the Office for Social Inclusion, the Department of the Taoiseach, the Voluntary Activity Units of the various government Departments, and others such as the Institute of Public Administration.

Stage one:
- A review of best practice in partnership working within policy arenas in other jurisdictions to identify the structures, processes and modalities that are considered most effective in terms of outcomes of anti-poverty policy work[40].
- A review of practice in partnership working within policy arenas within this State at local, county/local authority, regional and national level to identify priority areas of concern and best practice.
- The development of a common Code of Practice and a set of standards on partnership working in policy arenas. A specific aspect of the Code should address policy engagement.

Stage two:
This involves two areas of activity.

    a) Combat Poverty, in collaboration with the lead Departments and relevant training bodies, should take a lead in the design, development and implementation of a learning-to-practice initiative aimed at improving the approach to partnership working in policy arenas that address poverty issues and at supporting and developing institutional good practice in relation to partnership working. This initiative could include training courses, information seminars, the development of good practice guides to working in partnership with the community sector and other stakeholders in state-led policy arenas that address poverty. These activities may be arena-specific and/or issue specific.

    b) Working with anti-poverty organisations such as the national anti-poverty networks and the NWCI, Combat Poverty should support the development of relevant learning initiatives designed to enhance the capacity of community and voluntary organisations to undertake policy work in these policy arenas. This work can build on and add value to previous work undertaken by some national organisations.

Stage three
- Develop a mechanism to monitor, analyse, review and evaluate partnership working within these policy arenas towards revising and enhancing the Code to meet changing policy priorities and circumstances.

- Actions to review and reflect on this initiative should be included and documentation from each stage should be made available on Combat Poverty's website.

- Combat Poverty should ensure that progress, developments and learning from the initiative are communicated to the relevant institutional arrangements on poverty such as the Social Inclusion Units and Voluntary Activity Units.

This initiative would constitute a major undertaking by Combat Poverty and necessitate sound planning matched with resources and good partnership working to be successful. However, it would contribute significantly to the effectiveness of policy arenas that address poverty issues, and it has the potential to make a significant contribution to knowledge on effective partnership working and practice and to enhance the policy voice and participation of FRCs, CDPs and Partnerships within these policy arenas.

2. Support the development of agenda-setting anti-poverty policy messages
This research highlighted a number of developments that, cumulatively, contribute to difficulties in the policy engagement of anti-poverty organisations at local and national levels. Aside from those relating to partnership working, these developments include the dominance of a growth-oriented economic development paradigm within a wealthy society, which makes the recognition and implementation of an anti-poverty agenda difficult. It also includes a strong focus on service-delivery responses to poverty within policy and within policy arenas, with the role of the community and voluntary sectors both encouraged towards that end.

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[40] A number of developments on this area have been undertaken in other jurisdictions for example, Canada has a *Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue* (October 2002) and New Zealand's Ministry of Social Affairs has produced a *Code of Practice Guide for Working with Local Government* for its officials (2005).

This trend has been recognised in other recent research on community development in Ireland[41].

It is critical that policy responses to poverty are broader than just the delivery of services and that the policy advocacy role of anti-poverty organisations is recognised and supported.

The legitimacy of engaging in social policy for non-economic growth ends has been recognised by the National Economic and Social Development Office in its publication 'The Developmental Welfare State'-

> A society is more than its economy, and there are legitimate and important objectives for social policy that have nothing to do directly with fostering employability or productivity[42].

However, two developments are necessary to effectively influence the public policy process within the current environment:

• The generation of key, well-researched, agenda-setting anti-poverty policy messages targeted at high-level policy arenas

• The delivery of these messages in a structured manner from aligned organisations working collectively at national and other levels on poverty.

Combat Poverty's statutory remit includes the promotion, commission and interpretation of research[43]. Combat Poverty should engage with community sector structures such as the Community Platform[44] and national organisations to identify ways for providing consistent, well-researched, relevant, agenda-setting policy messages and to ensure these messages are communicated effectively throughout the community and voluntary sector active in policy. Potential outcomes of such an

initiative include directing the current growth-focused policy paradigm towards other legitimate social policy aims and supporting the learning and policy engagement of organisations working locally, regionally and nationally with cutting-edge policy information.

3. Maximising policy learning within other poverty and social inclusion programmes
There are now many programmes and initiatives addressing poverty, social inclusion and equality[45] led by different departments and agencies and implemented locally and regionally. Projects across all three programmes are key local mechanisms for the implementation of many of these initiatives. This research has focused on the anti-poverty policy work of just these three programmes and highlighted the need for further work to maximise the potential for policy learning and policy development.

Given what we have learned from this research, it is legitimate to question whether a firm strategic framework exists at national level that captures the learning from the range of poverty and social inclusion initiatives currently being undertaken. Combat Poverty's statutory remit includes the promotion of greater understanding of the nature, causes and extent of poverty in the State[46] and it has close links with the Office for Social Inclusion[47]. Combat Poverty should take the lead in exploring the extent that learning from the implementation of these various initiatives is captured, analysed and strategically informs the significant anti-poverty policy frameworks in an on-going way such as the National Development Plan and the next National Action Plan on Social Inclusion and the current institutional arrangements on poverty.

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41 See Powell, F. & Geoghegan, M. (2004) *The Politics of Community Development.*
42 NESDO (2005) p.xiv and 7.
43 Section 4.(1).(c) of the Combat Poverty Agency Act.
44 The Community Platform is made up of national networks and organisations within the community and voluntary sector which are engaged in combating poverty and social exclusion and promoting equality and justice. It was set up in 1996 to enable the sector to participate as a social partner in negotiations at a national level. The Platform participants share a common commitment to development, equality and justice in Irish society and their work is focused on the elimination of exclusion, poverty and inequality. They share a common set of values based on participation, a collective focus, solidarity and accountability. The Community Platform acts as a mechanism for its participants to develop solidarity on issues of social inclusion, equality and poverty and to strengthen the individual and collective impact of member groups in decision making processes.
45 For example, on rural transport, health, education disadvantage and so on. Examples include EQUAL, the Rural Transport Initiative, the Equality for Women Measure and others.
46 Section 4 (1) (d) of the Act.
47 The Office for Social Inclusion itself is linked into a complex set of institutional arrangements on poverty that includes Departmental Social Inclusion Units, a Management Group of Assistant Secretaries, a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion supported by a Senior Officials Group and an Annual Social Inclusion Forum.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 People that contributed to the research as interviewees

Bennett, Pat	Family Support Agency
Carroll, Eileen	Disability Equality Support Agency
Carty, Brian	PLANET
Dooley, Sean	Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs
Ginnell, Paul	European Anti-Poverty Network
Keane, Sharon	Combat Poverty Agency
Kelly, Nuala	Pobal
Kelly, Packie	Mullaghmatt Cortolvin FRC, National Forum of FRCs
Lloyd, Aidan	Pobal
Loftus, Camille	One Parent Exchange and Network
McCall, Toni	Community Partnerships Network
McLoughlan, Sean	Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs
Mac an Beatha, Eamonn	Pobal
Mee, Morgan	West Training
O'Brien, Brid	Pavee Point
O'Connor, Christina	Family Support Agency
O'Dowd, Siobhan	Ballyphehane Togher CDP, CDP NAC
O'Neill, Cathleen	Kilbarrack CDP, CDP NAC
Regan, Sean	Community Worker's Co-op
Shorthall, Ann	Bagnelstown FRC, National Forum of FRCs
Woulfe, Toby	Pobal

Appendix 2

Details of case-studies

St. Brigid's Family & Community Centre   Dick Hickey
37 Lower Yellow Road, Waterford   Angela Joy
Tel. 051-375 261
email: stbrigidsfcc@eircom.net

Galway Traveller Movement   Margaret O'Riada
1 The Plaza, Headford Road, Galway   Julia Sweeney
Tel 091-765 390   Clionadh O'Keeffe
email: info@gtmtrav.ie   Anne Costello

Wexford Area Partnership   Bernard O'Brien
Cornmarket, Mallin St., Waterford
Tel 053-23884
Email: paula@wap.iol.ie
Bernard O'Brien

Appendix 3

List of respondents to the survey

Pobail le Cheile CDP

Acorn CDP

Community Connections CDP

Clondalkin Travellers Development Group

Access 2000

Cul le Cheile CDP

Kerry County Network

Bluebell CDP

North West Roscommon CDP

Clare Women's Network

Hospital FRC

Le Cheile FRC

Spafield FRC

St. Andrew's FRC

Aonad FRC

Cara Phort FRC

KWCD Partnership

Inishowen Partnership

Ballyhoura Partnership

West Cork Community Partnership

Castlecomer District Community Development Network

Galway City Partnership

Drogheda Partnership

Appendix 4

Questionnaire circulated to sample of CDPs, FRCs, partnerships

COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY 'HAVING YOUR SAY'
MAPPING POLICY WORK AND POLICY LEARNING NEEDS RESEARCH

*If you have any query on this questionnaire, feel free to call Siobhán Airey
and I'll be happy to help you complete this over the phone.*

Project information

Name of project: **Age of project:**

_____

Contact person re. this survey and contact phone number:

_____

1. Overview of policy activity (2000-2006)

The purpose of this section is to get an overview of the kind of anti-poverty policy activity your (PROJECT) engaged in over the period 2000-2006.

1.1 Did your (PROJECT) engage in policy activity over the period 2000-2006?

      ☐ No (if no please go to q. 1.5)

      ☐ Yes (if 'yes', please go to q. 1.2)

1.2 Please identify any of the following policy related activities that your (PROJECT) may have engaged in over the period 2000-2006 (please tick).

☐ Networking with others   ☐ Undertaking research on an issue

☐ Working with others to develop positions and strategies to address policy issuesfor policy submissions   ☐ Responding to requests

☐ Participating in policy arenas (committees, consultations and so on)   ☐ Campaigning (seeking change to an existing situation)

☐ Mainstreaming good practice   ☐ Other (please describe)

1.3 What (if any) were the main issues on which your (PROJECT) undertook policy-focused work over the period 2000-2006 (please tick)?

☐ Non-formal education   ☐ Training, un/employment & enterprise

☐ Housing & accommodation   ☐ Health and well-being

☐ Childcare   ☐ Youth work

☐ Inter-cultural & anti-racism work ☐ Equality (including gender equality)

☐ Drugs ☐ Welfare rights and entitlements

☐ Services & facilites ☐ Other (please describe)
(transport, community facilities and so on)

1.4 What (if any) were the main policy mechanisms that your (PROJECT) engaged with at each level described below? (For example, your (PROJECT) might have been involved with an anti-racism network at local level, a homelessness forum at local authority level, a Regional Planning Committee on Violence Against Women at regional level or a national anti-poverty organisation at national level).

Level	Policy mechanism
Local	
Local authority	
Regional	
National	
EU/international	

1.5 Were there anti-poverty policy opportunities or initiatives over the period 2000-2006 that your (PROJECT) would like to have engaged with but was unable to?
☐ No
☐ Yes (if yes, please describe and, if possible, identify the reasons for this)

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Policy supports available to your organisation

This section seeks to identify the supports available to your (PROJECT) to help undertake anti-poverty policy work over the period 2000-2006

2.1 What were the main supports available to your (PROJECT) to undertake policy work? (These can include organisations at local or national level, internal programme supports, other people, publications, electronic resources and so on).

_____

_____

_____

_____

2.2 What were the main sources of information and learning that your (PROJECT) found helpful on anti-poverty policy work?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Policy learning and support needs

This question seeks to identify the main policy learning and support needs that your CDP has towards enhancing its work into the future.

3.1 Did your (PROJECT) encounter any difficulties in undertaking policy work over the period 2000-2006?

☐ No

☐ Yes (If yes, please describe the main difficulties)

_____

_____

_____

3.2 What are the main policy learning and support needs that your (PROJECT) may have at present? (Please tick).

☐ Knowledge of the policy system related to the issues we address

☐ Identifying a policy focus to the issues we address and developing policy responses

☐ Tools and techniques for influencing policy (e.g. research, how the political system works and so on)

☐ Other (please describe)

4. And for the next two years…

The purpose of this section is to offer an opportunity to give your opinion on strengthening and supporting policy work undertaken by (PROJECT)s.

4.1 In your opinion, how can anti-poverty policy work undertaken by (PROJECT)s be strengthened and supported to work more for the advantage of marginalised groups and their advocates in Ireland?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please email it to s.airey@telus.net or fax it to Siobhan Airey by Thursday July 13.

Appendix 5

Template used for case-study approach

A case study on mapping policy work for CPA research project – main areas for information

1.Focus of the case-study
The focus of the case-study will be on the policy work of (project) under the following areas

2.Context of the issue(s)
This will include a brief description of the local context in relation to poverty and disadvantage.

3.Definition/understanding policy work
This will include a brief description of what (project's) understanding of policy work is in relation to its work on poverty.

4.Policy aims and objectives re. issues being addressed
This is a description of what (project) wants to achieve in relation to changes in

5.Process - strategies to achieve these, actions and activities undertaken
This is a description of how (project) has gone about trying to achieve its policy aims and objectives. What has it done?

6.Role of the project
This is a description of the roles undertaken by (project) in engaging in policy work.

7.Achievements/outcomes and (possibly) lack therein
This relates to the results of the policy work – what has changed?

8.Challenges/difficulties & resources available to address these
This can include difficulties that (project) faced in undertaking its policy work and what resources it drew on to help overcome these. It can also include policy learning and information needs. Resources can be internal to the organisation, to the programme and other programmes that (project) is linked to and they can be external to all of these also.

9.Insights and learning
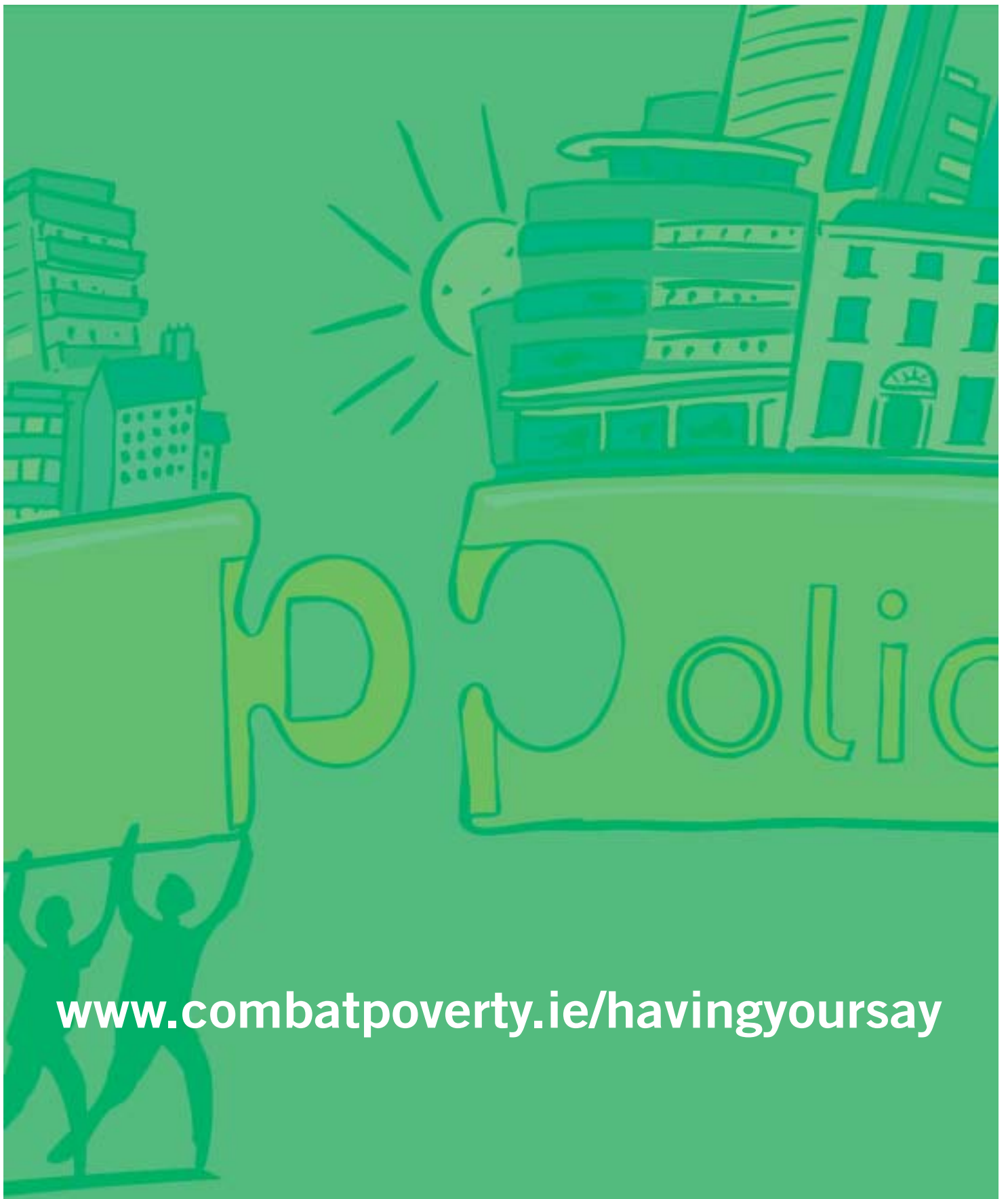What are the main 'findings' that (project) has in reflecting on its policy work over the last 6 years?

10.Moving forward – what next?
How could (project)'s policy work achieve more re. addressing poverty into the future?

11. AOB

www.combatpoverty.ie/havingyoursay

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

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