

Cover page

Wealth, Power, Inequality:
Challenges for Community Work in a New Era

***Wealth, Power, Inequality:
Challenges for Community Work in a New Era***

The conference was held in the Newpark Hotel, Kilkenny,
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About the Community Workers Co-operative

The Community Workers Co-operative is a national organisation founded in
1981, whose members are committed to promoting and supporting
community work as a means of achieving radical social change.

The context in which community work happens has changed dramatically
since 1981. Consequently, we are constantly seeking new and effective means
of achieving equality and justice for all.

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Glossary of frequently used abbreviations

CDB	City / County Development Board
CDSP	Community Development Support Programme
CORI	Conference of Religious in Ireland
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency
CWC	Community Workers Co-operative
DSFCA	Department of Social, Family and Community Affairs
ESRI	Irish Economic and Social Research Institute
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GDP	Gross-Domestic Product
GNP	Gross-National Product
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPF	Programme for Prosperity & Fairness (Partnership Agreement 1999 - 2002)
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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Introduction

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The Community Workers Co-operative conference ‘Wealth, Power, Inequality: Challenges for Community Work in a New Era’ held in Kilkenny in 2001 came at a time of considerable change in the context in which community work and the community sector operates in Ireland, and indeed globally. Ireland, while continuing to be the fastest growing economy in the European Union, was coming to the end of its recent economic boom period. There was, and continues to be, largely unquestioned domination of a neo-liberal model of economic development both nationally and internationally. There were major reductions in unemployment and consistent poverty during the ‘Celtic Tiger’ period. Yet Ireland has remained an increasingly unequal society with a widening relative poverty gap, a two-tier health system benefiting the better-off, increased homelessness, and persistent exclusion and marginalisation of particular communities. Refugee, asylum seeker and migrant worker issues have emerged as new areas of social exclusion.

The community sector remains the only voice highlighting and challenging issues of inequality and social exclusion and offering a critique of the dominant model of development. A sign of a healthy democracy would be acknowledgement of the value of this voice and support for it. (Indeed the Taoiseach has acknowledged the value of the ‘creative tension’ generated by this independent voice). Unfortunately, the experience of the community sector over recent years is of increased marginalisation of this voice and of moves to direct community work and community development towards service delivery and meeting individual needs rather than supporting the critical voice and independence of communities experiencing poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

In 1996, writing on the previous Community Workers Co-operative Kilkenny conference, Philip Watt concluded that *‘...while partnership may be here in name, the construction of real partnership requires a lot more than words. Lessons from past experiences need to be learned, one of the most important of these being the need to build inclusive, participative models of partnership’* (‘Partnership in Action: The role of community development and partnership in Ireland’ CWC, 1996).

Since then, the community sector in general, and the Community Workers Co-

operative in particular, has invested a lot of energy and time in engaging in social partnership processes. At a national level the CWC has been centrally involved with, and acted as secretariat of, the Community Platform¹ in their participation in the Partnership 2000 and Programme for Prosperity and Fairness national social partnership agreements, and in the negotiations for the current national agreement 'Sustaining Progress'. At a local level the CWC Local Government subgroup and the staff working on the Local Social Partnership project worked to ensure that local anti-poverty and equality groups could participate as meaningfully as possible in emerging local social partnership structures.

However, over recent years the community sector has increasingly asked questions about these processes. It seems that lessons from the past have not been learned about the need to be inclusive and participative. Is social partnership a process likely to deliver positive outcomes for communities experiencing social exclusion, or does it merely find the lowest common denominator between the partners and co-opt the community sector to manage the status quo and maintain existing structural inequalities?

These were, and continue to be, ongoing concerns of the community sector and were reiterated at the CWC regional seminars held in late 2001 to give direction and to identify the themes to be discussed at the Kilkenny conference. As it happens the publication of this document in 2003 is timely, as the concerns raised and discussed at the conference are even more pertinent today. There have been serious cutbacks in resources for the community sector.

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs are currently

¹ The Community Platform is a platform of national anti-poverty and equality organisations. At the time of writing there are 27 such organisations in the Community Platform:

Age Action Ireland	National Adult Literacy Agency
Community Action Network	National Network of Women's Refuges and Support Services
Community Workers Co-operative	National Traveller Women's Forum
European Anti-Poverty Network	National Women's Council of Ireland
Forum for People with Disabilities	One Parent Exchange and Network
Gay & Lesbian Equality Network	Pavee Point
Irish Association of Older People	Rape Crisis Network Ireland
Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas	Simon Communities of Ireland
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed	Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
Irish Penal Reform Trust	Threshold
Irish Refugee Council	Voluntary Drug Treatment Network
Irish Rural Link	Vincentian Partnership For Justice
Irish Traveller Movement	Women's Aid
Migrant Information Centre	

reviewing the Community Development Support Programme, the RAPID Programme and the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme. Improved coherence, coordination and use of resources are, of course, desirable. However, these reviews must also recognise and value the crucial developmental roles played by these programmes.

The questions about social partnership have also become even more relevant in the context of the recent negotiations on the new national agreement 'Sustaining Progress'. The experience of the Community Platform in that process and the lack of any meaningful commitments to addressing poverty and social exclusion led to them rejecting the agreement. The CWC and the Community Platform remain committed to social partnership as one avenue of bringing about social change, and see it as being more than any one agreement. However, others do not share this interpretation and we face the possible exclusion of anti-poverty and equality voices from national social partnership structures. This raises concern about the degree to which healthy dialogue and the articulation of a critical voice are valued in these structures.

Setting the Scene:

Reports from the CWC Regional Seminars

The themes to be discussed at the conference were identified by CWC during a number of regional membership meetings held in six locations – Dublin, Galway, Cork, Limerick, Donegal and Kilkenny in the months and weeks coming up to the Kilkenny Conference. A common set of concerns and issues arose regarding the changing context of community work and the challenges being faced in progressing anti-poverty and equality work on the ground. Many of these issues resonated with experiences and concerns arising in various other fora at local, regional and national level.

- A recurring theme identified was the crucial need to maintain, restate and strengthen the understanding of Community Work as a mechanism for social change, focused on poverty, inequality and social exclusion, being collective, based on participation, solidarity with the marginalised, anti-sexist and anti-racist. There was a lot of concern about a move away from this understanding of community work towards a focus on the individual and on service delivery, particularly at local level. It was argued that community work, which is about challenging power and the structural causes of poverty and inequality, is always unpopular with those interested in maintaining the status quo.

- It was noted that community work organisations are coming under increased risks of being co-opted to deliver on an agenda of managing poverty and inequality rather than developing and articulating an agenda for social change based on the experiences and objectives of those experiencing poverty, inequality and social exclusion. A symptom of this is the way community work is becoming more technical and formalised and less political and analytical.
- Related to this is the need for the anti-poverty and equality sector to maintain an independent critical voice and to reclaim its own agenda. Challenges to this autonomy are impacting on the ability of the sector to influence change and to engage in advocacy work.
- There is a need for more consciousness raising about the structural causes of poverty and inequality and for the development and dissemination of material on social analysis rather than purely technical information.
- Community workers need to be more self-aware and we need to critique our practice in relation to a social change analysis. We need to revitalise the activist nature of community work.
- The role of local experience as a basis for national agenda setting needs to be strengthened, as do the linkages between national and local activity.
- The global dimension of social change needs to be revitalised. Without a global analysis community work at both local and national levels is in danger of becoming disconnected from a structural analysis of poverty and inequality.
- Concern was expressed about the cost of engagement by the sector in national social partnership versus the results achieved. The gap between commitments made and actual implementation is a growing problem. Social partnership must be seen as just one avenue to achieving social change. The community sector needs to rebalance its focus to include campaigning, engagement in the political process, etc.

Wealth, Power, Inequality: Challenges for Community Work in a New Era

One of the key issues highlighted was the need to recognise the international context in which we are trying to bring about social change and the global forces that resist this. Andy Storey lays out this global context clearly, showing how governance is being undermined and power and wealth being concentrated in the hands of a small elite. He discusses the 'structural violence' of the current neo-liberal model of development and of international structures and processes that condemn so many people to lives of poverty and suffering. If we want to challenge this, those of us committed to bringing about social change need to develop international alliances and better ways of informing each other and of working together.

In her paper Mary Murphy also looks at the structural nature of inequality and how the resources of the Celtic Tiger were unequally shared in favour of the wealthy and powerful. She points out how this is a logical product of a model of development and of a society that increasingly values individualism and prides itself in a low taxation ideology. The experience of the Celtic Tiger shows clearly that economic growth alone does bring about social inclusion. She also offers a critique of social partnership and concludes that participation in social partnership is not necessarily the same thing as participative democracy. Experience shows that weak models or flawed understanding of participation can actually be damaging

Fintan Farrell looks at the role of the community sector in bringing about social change including why attempts are made to dilute the anti-poverty and equality focus of the community sector. The Community Platform, for example, has a very clear anti-poverty and equality agenda that has been mediated through the state-constructed Community and Voluntary Pillar in engaging in national social partnership. Engagement in this process placed a huge demand on the time and commitment of the organisations in the Community Platform, in particular of the CWC. Being identified as part of a wider community and voluntary sector makes it difficult to maintain a clear anti-poverty and equality agenda. This is increasingly the case at the local level with the establishment of participatory structures that do not promote a distinctive anti-poverty or equality voice. Echoing the views of CWC members on the ground, one of the challenges he identifies for the community sector is the need to build a momentum for change that requires a political response. It is increasingly felt that such political pressure is necessary for other avenues, such as social partnership, to deliver meaningful outcomes.

A key challenge is to maintain clarity about the transformational role of community work, its focus on poverty, inequality and social exclusion, and the principles which underpin it. Related to this is the need for the sector to maintain its independent critical voice and the freedom to set and articulate its own agendas. By its nature, community work involves challenging existing power norms and structures in favour of those with less power. There is therefore interest by some in diluting this understanding of community work in favour of a more individualistic, service provision model that serves to maintain the status quo. Anastasia Crickley explores the recent history of community work and community development in Ireland and clearly shows that it must be about social change if it is to mean anything. Community work must be about exposing awkward questions rather than obscuring them.

Seán Regan discusses how community work and community work principles are intrinsically linked with sustainable development. Sustainability has three elements – social, economic and environmental. Ireland has serious problems in all three of these areas. In particular a society that does not urgently address social exclusion or growing inequality, especially when its economy is growing, cannot be considered to be advancing in relation to sustainable development. He echoes Andy Storey's paper in highlighting the importance of the international dimension. While the neo-liberal model of globalisation is a very destructive force, there are other global movements that work to challenge this. The United Nations and various initiatives related to it, such as the World Conference Against Racism, offer positive models of development. Amongst the challenges facing the community sector is building alliances with others both nationally and globally who are committed to bringing about positive social change.

Many presenters identified the need for the community sector to develop new strategies for bringing about social change. Aiden Lloyd looks at a Rights Based approach as one such alternative strategy. Such an approach is based on social, cultural and economic rights as distinct from more traditional civil and political rights. In the current context of development the dominant concepts have shifted back from social inclusion to better targeting of services, from participation to consultation. Social inclusion and equality need to be put back up on the agenda as key societal goals and he suggests that a rights based approach offers one mechanism for achieving this. He restates some of the overarching themes of the conference when he identifies that in order to do this the community sector needs to be able to articulate this agenda in an independent way.

The community sector also needs to improve the ways in which we organise and work together, and we need to build alliances with others who share some or all of our agenda.

Conclusion

The Kilkenny conference offered a useful space for the community sector to come together and discuss the challenges and issues facing them at the beginning of a new millennium. One aspect of the modern era is the intensity of the work required at both local and national level. Unfortunately this impacts negatively on the space to come together and reflect on themes such as those discussed here. One of the most common sentiments expressed by participants at the Kilkenny conference was of the value of this space and the need to ensure that such events are held more frequently.

The insights and perspectives presented here offer an overview of these issues and challenges. The current context, both nationally and internationally, is a hostile one for promoting issues of equality and social inclusion. In such a climate it is essential for the community sector to revisit its principles and to be clear about what it stands for and about what community work is. The independent voice of the community sector in articulating the experience and demands of those living in poverty, inequality or social exclusion is needed more than ever. However, we also need to become more aware of, and engaged in the global context of our work. We need to expand the collective nature of the struggle and develop new alliances with others nationally and internationally who share our vision of a more just, equal and sustainable society.

A Global View on Wealth, Power and Inequality

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On the 20th of September, Donald Rumsfeld, US Defence Secretary, was asked what he would consider a victory in the so-called 'war on terrorism'. He replied that he would consider as victory convincing the world that Americans be allowed to continue with their way of life. This echoes George Bush Senior's comment at the time of the 1992 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, that the American way of life was non-negotiable. These comments refer, of course, only to some Americans – it is only corporate interests whose way of life is non-negotiable, and who therefore deserve subsidies to shore them up after 11th September; redundant workers, by contrast, can go to the wall.

Economist Paul Krugman highlights how Congress has voted \$15 billion in aid and loan guarantees for airline companies but not a cent for laid-off airline workers. The House of Representatives has passed a 'stimulus' bill that contains almost nothing for the unemployed but includes \$25 billion in retrospective corporate tax cuts – simple lump-sum transfers to corporations, most of them highly profitable. There has been an \$800 million lump-sum transfer to General Motors, at a time when the company is already sitting on \$8 billion in cash.

Inequality in both treatment and outcome is not confined to the United States. The world is, for the most part, becoming more unequal, both within and between countries. Figures from the UNDP's *Human Development Report 1999* illustrate this forcefully. The ratio between the average income of a person in the richest country in the world and one in the poorest was 3:1 in 1820, 11:1 in 1913, 35:1 in 1950, 44:1 in 1973, and 72:1 in 1992. The trends, as always, mark uneven patterns of progress and decline: for example, Japan's average income was only 20% that of the US in 1950, but had risen to 90% in 1992. Gains are possible for some (and sometimes for many), whether in Japan or Ireland, as they always have been in the context of an unevenly developing capitalist system.

However, over the last two decades, accelerating liberalisation and globalisation has intensified the trend towards inequality in many parts of the world, most strikingly in the former Soviet Union – income inequality in Russia alone doubled between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Ireland, and most other Western countries, have also, as we know, become ever more unequal societies. The brochure for this conference notes that *“there are growing inequalities and power imbalances within an increasingly polarised society nationally and globally”*.

At an individual level, the world’s 200 richest people more than doubled their net worth between 1994 and 1998 – their assets alone now exceed the combined incomes of 41% of the world’s people. Corporate mergers and acquisitions generate a trend towards increasingly centralised control of not only production lines, but also of research and patent rights. The extent to which most governments cater to corporate power has been significantly enhanced.

Yet phenomena such as inequality and its impact cannot be adequately captured by imperfect facts and figures such as these. There is, for many, a deeper level of human frustration and powerlessness, of humiliation and violence at work here. I am sure this is something you are all already well aware of in your day-to-day work in deprived areas here in Ireland. One concept I find useful for expressing this is ‘structural violence’.

The condition of structural violence has been outlined by Peter Uvin in relation to pre-genocide (pre-1994) Rwanda. The condition is characterised by extreme poverty: Rwanda, proportionately, may have had more absolutely poor people (perhaps 90 per cent of the population) than anywhere else in the world. But the concept cannot be limited to poverty alone. Structural violence in Rwanda was also characterised by inequality, injustice, discrimination, corruption, and treatment of the poor with contempt. The poor – the vast majority of the population – were subjected to humiliation and a state of permanent exclusion from the benefits of ‘development’, benefits that neither they nor their children could ever hope to achieve but which were flaunted in their faces by wealthy locals and foreigners. As Uvin puts it, *“[T]he poor were considered backward, ignorant, and passive – almost subhuman – and were treated in a condescending, paternalistic and humiliating manner”*, by both the Rwandan elite and by expatriates.

“Long before the 1990s, life in Rwanda had become devoid of hopes and dreams for the large majority of people: the future looked worse than the already bad present ... Peasant life was perceived as a prison without escape in which poverty, infantilisation, social inferiority, and powerlessness combined to create a sense of personal failure”.

I think there may be a sense in which this condition is being increasingly globalised – powerlessness and perceived personal failure are the conditions into which many people are regularly and increasingly consigned, particularly (but not exclusively) by the exercise of overwhelming and totally self-centred power on the part of the United States. This phenomenon has been well captured by Naomi Klein, writing shortly after September 11th:

“The era of the video game war in which the US is always at the controls has produced a blinding rage in many parts of the world, a rage at the persistent asymmetry of suffering. This is the context in which twisted revenge seekers make no other demand than that American citizens share their pain”.

The war on Afghanistan is a case in point, and I want to talk about that for a little now, because it illustrates the extent to which Western power is willing to perpetuate an ‘asymmetry of suffering’ – to heighten structural violence – in order to protect and extend its own domination and economic interests.

What economic interests? The countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (the last two are neighbours of Afghanistan) may possess, or have access to, up to 85 billion barrels of oil and 11 trillion cubic metres of natural gas. The total potential value of Central Asian fossil fuels could be some \$3 trillion. Kazakhstan, in particular, has sufficient potential to be sometimes called ‘the new Kuwait’.

In 1997, a report of the US National Defense Panel noted that *“We will continue to be involved in regions that control scarce resources, such as the Middle East and the emerging Caspian Sea areas”*. Note how the automatic right of interfering in other peoples’ affairs is simply assumed, too obvious to even require discussion. The expatriate arrogance Uvin documents at the level of Rwanda is here writ large in the field of international relations.

A report prepared for the US Joint Chiefs of Staff in January 2001 has this to say on the security implications of developments in Central Eurasia:

“More than \$50 billion of US and Western investment already has been committed there since 1992. The oil and gas resources of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are bound to play a significant role in energy security planning not only in Western Europe but also in China, India, Japan, Pakistan and Turkey. The energy environments in Russia and Iran are also linked, albeit in different ways, to the role of the Caspian in the global energy market. It is inconceivable that so important an asset would exist for long without suggesting the need for security arrangements that are acceptable to external investors, dependent consumers and the new states themselves”.

Note how the new states themselves come at the end of that list of interested parties. US firms, including Exxon, Mobil and Chevron, are heavily involved. But it is not just US commercial interests that are at stake: exploration and production sites in Kazakhstan have attracted investment from British Gas, BP, Shell, TotalFinaElf of France, Agip of Italy and many other companies.

Interest in Caspian resources extends beyond their immediate location to cover pipelines also. And it is here that Afghanistan emerges as a key player. The point is openly acknowledged by official sources, including the US energy information administration, which in early September this year (a few days before the attacks of the 11th) commented: *“Afghanistan’s significance from an energy standpoint stems from its geographical position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from Central Asia to the Arabian Sea. This potential includes the possible construction of oil and natural gas export pipelines through Afghanistan”.* Afghanistan sits between the major oil and gas fields of the Caspian region and the very fast growing energy markets of India and Pakistan in particular, with potential for tanker transfer to Japan, Korea and China also, so its strategic significance as a transit route is considerable.

That significance was recognised by the California-based energy company UNOCAL in the mid-1990s, when it began investigating prospects for a pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistani ports on the Arabian Sea. UNOCAL was at the head of a consortium that also included Saudi Arabian, Japanese and Pakistani interests. The Taliban quickly emerged as UNOCAL’s potential business partners. In 1997, UNOCAL admitted giving what it termed ‘non-cash bonus payments’ to Taliban officials, on the grounds that, as a company Vice President put it, *“Some of them didn’t understand the idea of profit motive. We had to educate them”.*

Later in 1997, a Taliban delegation visited UNOCAL's office in Texas, and a few days later the Taliban's Minister of Mines met with the US State Department's top official for South Asia. The US government, at this stage, had a fairly open-minded approach to the Taliban, as evidenced by a quote of the time from a US diplomat: "*the Taliban will probably develop like the Saudis did. There will be ... pipelines, an emir, no parliament and lots of Sharia law. We can live with that*".

What did UNOCAL offer to pay the Taliban for transit rights through Afghanistan? A competitor company to UNOCAL – Bidas of Argentina – offered the Taliban \$1 billion in transit fees as well as assistance for infrastructural development and for the building of police posts every 20 kilometres along the route of the proposed pipeline. We can assume that the UNOCAL offer would have been of a similar nature, and would thus have been similarly bolstering of the capacity of the Taliban regime.

Attitudes to the Taliban altered somewhat after the bombings of the US embassies in east Africa and Clinton's missile strikes against Afghanistan in August 1998. As the political climate changed, investor interest in Afghan pipeline projects waned, and UNOCAL, at least temporarily, bailed out. Protests by feminist and environmental groups also played a role in forcing this turnaround. Some reports, especially from French intelligence sources, suggest that contacts between the US administration and the Taliban were resumed after February of this year and continued until at least August. It is difficult to know how much credence one can attach to these sources, but the reports of ongoing meetings between the US government and the Taliban seem plausible.

While professing outrage at Taliban activities, the commercial interests at the heart of US foreign policy (and they are not confined to the US) have been, and will be again, perfectly willing to do business with such forces. Take, for purposes of stark illustration, the example of Zbigniew Brzezinski, former US National Security Adviser and, by his own admission, the key architect of initial US support for the anti-Soviet Afghan Mujahideen. In an interview in 1998, Brzezinski was asked whether he did not regret having helped build up future terrorists - he replied, "*What is more important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire?*" One wonders how he would answer the question now, though he might, off the record, adopt a similarly pragmatic attitude, given that he is an adviser to the Azerbaijan International Operating Company, a consortium of twelve leading oil companies with extensive interests in the Caspian region.

Of course, it is not just about oil and gas. It is also about denying control of such vital resources to others, and about strategic control of the central Asian region more generally. In June of this year, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan founded the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO). In July, China and Russia signed a Treaty on Good Neighbourliness, Friendship and Co-operation. These two agreements represented, especially on the part of China, an attempt to promote 'multipolarisation' in world politics as a counter to US aspirations towards what is termed 'full-spectrum dominance'. Part of the thinking behind US policy is to limit, especially, Russian and Chinese spheres of influence in the region.

Full-spectrum dominance is the current military policy of the United States, and also explains the drive towards the militarisation of space, as reflected in the proposals for the so-called 'Son of Star Wars'. Returning again to Zbigniew Brzezinski, he usefully summarised the current strategy as follows: *"To put it in a terminology that hearkens back to the more brutal age of ancient empires, the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together"*.

And, in case you are wondering, I think Ireland can be classified as a vassal.

Let me move towards a conclusion. Inequality is nothing new, but it is probably accelerating in this era of globalisation. The willingness of the powerful to uphold inequality by force is also not new, though the end of the Cold War has allowed force to be projected with less restraint than before. Structural violence is also nothing new, though we may have used different words for it in the past. Nor is there anything new in the accurate conclusion of Ken Coates: *"Dominance, full-spectrum or otherwise, is absolutely incompatible with a democratically acceptable world order"*. The question is: how do we move from dominance and structural violence towards a democratic world order?

One option that seems to me to be a dead end is to encourage the emergence of the EU as an alternative political, economic and military bloc to the United States. The rationale in this, for some, is to move us away from US full-spectrum dominance, to create a counterweight to US power.

But we cannot assume that an EU capable of projecting unified and independent military force in the world would do so for benign reasons. The impact of commercial interests – arms manufacturers, oil companies and others – on EU governments is far from negligible. The chances of a genuinely progressive EU foreign and security policy emerging, seem to me to be very remote.

The alternative is not to enter into *partnership* with the forces of dominance and structural violence, as Ireland has already done through its participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace and proposed participation in the EU's Rapid Reaction Force. This makes us part of the problem, not the solution. The alternative is, rather, for us, as citizens, to enter into *opposition*. The Community Workers Co-operative's campaign of opposition to the war on Afghanistan is an example of what that might look like. Building and networking such campaigns is an urgent task for us all. Our task, in a way, to use the words of Brzezinski, is to bring the so-called barbarians together. There are things we will lose by trying – official partnership is not without its benefits, personal or collective. But not to try is to perpetuate and reinforce injustice, and to run the risk that those on the receiving end of global structural violence will respond with more violence of their own. Violence that is destructive of both themselves and others - including, possibly, ourselves.

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Andy Storey

Development Studies Centre, Kimmage Manor, and AFRI

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Further Reading:

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The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, 2002

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Le Nouvel Observateur, Paris, 15-21 January 1998

Poverty, Income and Power Inequalities

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Introduction

The theme of this paper, the relationship between income and wealth inequalities and power inequalities, is in some respects an old fashioned one. In a society that increasingly values individualism and prides itself on a low taxation ideology that rewards effort and enterprise, it is common to hear that income inequalities are inevitable and that income and wealth are the outcomes of each individuals own effort. In the context where the market is assumed to be all powerful, concepts like power and access to decision making are, to many people, far removed from and irrelevant to income distribution.

This paper welcomes the challenge of reviving debate about the structural nature of inequality and power relationships. The paper seeks to demonstrate that all three types of inequalities not only exist but are growing. The paper seeks to explore the political and ideological debate around income and wealth inequalities in Ireland and within that to explore whether or not social partnership has broken or reinforced existing power inequalities, ideologies and related distributive outcomes. At the heart of this paper is the conviction that nothing is inevitable, that alternative models of power exist and that different income distribution outcomes are both possible and desirable. The paper concludes by looking forward to the challenge of organising towards the end of greater equality.

Power and Decision-making

In reviewing inequalities in power and decision making it is important to realise that the policy environment is a complex and subtle animal and that in some respects we know little about it its finer workings. When we speak about power it is not just the power to make decisions. Power is also about the prevention of discussion, the refusal to make decisions. Power is also evident in our own tendency towards self censorship in the context of other more powerful actors dominant values. The struggle for gender equality has been as much obstructed by silent and hidden processes as by overt decisions.

Any analysis of the state in terms of the Oireachtas, the administrative apparatus or the judiciary falls down considerably on class, socio-economic, gender or minorities participation. A gender breakdown of women in politics shows women hold 20% of ministries, 24% of junior ministries, make up only 13% of TDs, 18% of senators and only 3% of county or city managers.

So too if other forms of representative democracy are analysed, there are clear class, age, gender and other equality distinctions in both membership of a political party and voting participation rates in Ireland.

Voting participation is dropping at both national and local elections, compare 75% in the 1977 general election with 65% in 1997, or 56% in the 1991 local elections with 49% in 1999. However, in working class areas the drop is extreme with as low as 17% recorded in the last general election and rates of only 25% are common place.

Other types of power bases, some of which are being explored today, like education, church and media, throw up similar inequalities. We also need to be aware of newer and sometimes more subtle forms of power that are constantly emerging. Community development has always been aware of the empowerment values of tools like information, knowledge, awareness, networks analytical skills. The power of articulation and communication is increasingly important. Much of this is increasingly negotiated by technology, access to technology and the digital divide is a new form of power inequality.

From representative democracy to participative democracy

The recent constitutional review group reflected on the increasing emphasis on participation and partnership in governance, it was broadly supportive of this trend towards broadening participation and saw such trends as indicative of the weaknesses in existing systems of political representation.

Lloyd (CWC, 2001) holds that trends towards participation were evident in Ireland since the days of Muintir na Tire's role in rural electrification and intensified as a consequence of European led social inclusion thinking in the 70s and 80s.

A community development approach to participation implies that increased participation means a redistribution of power in favour of the least powerful and that this in turn will realise a lasting structural shift in resources allocation. It is worth noting however that both local, national and international history shows that increased participation is not necessarily a good thing and that it can be as much a destructive force as a force for equality.

Weak models of consultation for example have been used to justify decisions that work against the interests of those participating in the consultation processes. We will return to this point when we are discussing social partnership and its limitations!

The civil servant

A common feature of both representative democracy and participative democracy is the public services representatives who advise and implement policy and who also negotiate policy with social partners. While this paper cannot do justice to an exploration of the power base of the public servant I would strongly contend that no discussion of power could be complete without one. Lloyd makes much of the catholic educated elite at the top of the Irish public service and suggests they are influenced by a belief or ideology that both hierarchy and poverty are inevitable. Structural **change** is not high on the agenda. Problem solving and strategising are on the agenda as long such processes leave basic structures unchallenged. Witness for example the National Health Strategy and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy!

Of particular interest in this discussion, I would hold, is the growing development and intermeshing of institutions and the growing number of public appointments that support and sustain the Irish model of social partnership. This in effect represents a new triangle of power with social partners, government and policy institutions that maintain and renew ideologies that at the end of the day reinforce income inequalities.

There have been some attempts to change the process of decision-making, social audits, equality and gender proofing, rural proofing and poverty proofing. In theory these tools or processes aim to change the culture and reality of decision making so that policy is more reflective of specific needs/issues and targets. In practice they have yet to prove themselves. The rights based approach has also been forwarded as an alternative way to balance decision-making towards the less powerful. The huge resistance to this approach suggests it may well be the most likely strategy to achieve change, but progress is much more likely at a global or at least international level than national.

Income and wealth

While income inequalities are much analysed and the subject of recent and ongoing debate in Ireland there are still serious data deficiencies especially with regard to information on wealth inequalities. These deficits seriously impede any discussion of wealth and have been the subject of much criticism including comment from both the UN and OECD as well as closer to home by CPA and many commentators.

From what we do know we can say that Ireland was and still is one of the least equitable countries in the world.

Lyons, using 1966 estate returns, showed the top 1% of population owning 30% of net wealth. In 1991 Nolan estimated the top 1% owned about 20% of wealth and the top 10% of the population own about 50% of the wealth. Much of what has been discovered in the tribunals of the last few years tells its own story.

The following sections illustrate a somewhat random tapestry of inequalities, drawn primarily from work by Colm O'Reardon in *Rich and Poor* (CPA, 2001) and Brian Nolan (CPA, 1990 and CPA, 2001) and ESRI *Bust to Boom* (various chapters). Despite the random nature of the data and the obvious data deficits in the area of wealth statistics, we can conclude that Ireland has some of the worst inequalities in the EU and OECD and that these inequalities are intensifying both over time and relative to international trends.

Poverty trends at the 50% disposable household income over 1994 to 1998 show increasing relative income poverty (from 16.3% to 24.6% at the 50% household line). At the same time we have had a substantial reduction in consistent deprivation type poverty (from 16% to 8% at the 60% line).

Real incomes have been raising for everybody but the pace of change for the top of income distribution has been moving away from the middle and the depth of those beneath the poverty line has been deepening – gap widening primarily caused by the rich getting richer and by the failure of social welfare payments to keep pace with average increase in income. The risk of this poverty has shifted over this time and is now experienced by women, children older people and people with disabilities – all of whom have no or less access to the labour market.

Access to employment is a huge barometer of inequality and access to decent earnings from employment a even more important barometer. Ireland has seen quite remarkable employment growth (43% employment rate in 1988 rose to 54.4% in 1999 representing over half a million new jobs). We have had a significant reduction in long-term unemployment (10.4% in 1988 to only 1.7% in early 2001), yet we still have up to 500,000 job-less adults and high levels of unemployment in geographical pockets including many rural areas. Groups like Travellers and people with disabilities suffer high levels of unemployment.

The level of earnings dispersion in Ireland is one of the highest in the OECD. While at the lowest end we have the third lowest wages in the OECD, in the higher end of earnings distribution we have had marked increases in earnings and associated shares/pensions/bonus arrangements. Earnings at the top decile grow from a 1.82 proportion of the median in 1987 to 2.02 proportion of the median in 1997.

Women still experience a 15% pay differential and there are more women on low pay and seven times more women than men in part time employment. Not surprising then that women share only 26% of national income - a fact that gives us rank 24 out of 26 in the UN Human Development Report 1997.

All Irish analysis of shares of income and other inequality measures show the same thing; Ireland has high levels of inequality and greater inequality than most of our European neighbours (surpassed only by Spain, Portugal and UK) and that inequality is growing year on year. The bottom 10% have less than 2% (1994 2.3% – 1998 1.8%) compared to the top 10% share of 26.1% in 1998. Or to look at this in another way, the top 50% of households hold 77% of total disposable income.

There are those who say that this growing inequality is inevitable, a natural outcome of market forces. But none of this is inevitable and none of this has happened by accident. While in a general sense government policy and intervention reduces inequalities, of late social welfare transfers are the only really effective intervention. In fact the tendency of the market to produce income inequality has been exacerbated by recent budgetary taxation decisions. The ESRI have recently developed methodologies that allow us examine the income distribution outcomes of budgets. The methodology assumes that a neutral budget would have maintained incomes by indexing all incomes equally.

If we examine the distributive effect of budgetary policy 87-91 or look at the distribution of net resources across tax and welfare 87-91 we can see very clear distributional outcomes in favour of the better off. Indeed CPA reviewed the allocation of resources in recent budgets and showed gross inequity in the allocations. They show that from 1999 to 2001 89% of post indexation additional resources went on tax and that over 85% of this went to top 50% of income profile.

The tax treatment of wealth has also changed substantially over the present government but also over the past 20 years. We have seen substantial reductions (more than 50% in some cases) in Capital Gains Tax, Capital Acquisition Tax, and the abolition of Property Tax.

We have also seen a substantial increase in the number of discretionary tax expenditures and reliefs most of which are still available at the higher rate. The tax treatment of pensions makes an interesting case study in this regard, the cost of which has escalated by over 1% GNP and the distribution of which is predominantly to the top 5 income deciles and at the marginal rate. The availability of these discretionary reliefs complements the changing sources of personal income with greater emphasis on income created interest payments, dividends and rent.

The profits to wages ratio has shifted substantially in the years of social partnership where over the last 14 years the evolution of the profit share has seen Ireland catch up on the rest of Europe and seen profits grow from being 31% to 41% of non-agricultural national income. This evolution of profit share has to be seen in the context of significant reductions in corporation taxation.

Consumer spending has grown by as much as 17% in one year (2000), much of it concentrated unevenly in the luxury goods, cars, electrical equipment and holidays. An analysis of the household budget surveys show some structural shifts in spending patterns of Irish families in the higher income bracket where spending on luxury goods have also grown relative to basic foodstuffs. The rate of home ownership and massive increase in house prices have brought asset wealth to many Irish families. This increased home ownership combined with a trend towards smaller families will mean that inheritance of property will become an even more important transfer of wealth in Ireland.

Do income inequalities matter?

So we can conclude that we have high income and wealth inequalities. But does this matter? Consistent poverty is, after all, falling, absolute income is rising for everyone. But income inequalities do matter. High income inequality is linked to poverty, especially child poverty, it is also linked to other structural inequalities like health inequalities. Such inequalities, if allowed to persist over time, are likely to be generational in nature and become harder to shift. There are considerable cost implications because of greater welfare spending but also because of the loss of income due to the failure to realise social and human capital. Three years in relative poverty means a persistence of income poverty that makes consistent or absolute poverty very likely. All this makes a convincing case for less inequality.

But why do we have to be so reasonable? From a human rights perspective inequality is wrong. Poverty is wrong. In the present political climate it is crucial to restate basic beliefs and values about the equal value of all people.

“The right wing mantra of keeping down spending and cutting taxes, largely echoed by much of the media, has so largely infiltrated the consciousness of our political elite that they are almost totally unconscious of how far to the right our system has swung since the 70s” (Garett Fitzgerald).

A major barrier in the political debate about ideology is the degree to which comment on social and economic progress is so dominated by economic indicators of success especially GDP and GNP, which has been much critiqued from a gender and environmental perspective. The truth is that economic growth is not intrinsically linked to social inclusion.

However, as long as people buy the spin then this dominant ideology of global liberalism and ‘rising-tide-will-lift-all-boats’ mentality will permeate both political thought and economic organisation and related fiscal and budgetary policy which leads to growing inequality. A quote from Minister Dermot Ahern illustrates this nicely. From his position as Minister for Social Community and Family Affairs he defended growing inequality by arguing that *“we have had to have a widening of income distribution to ensure it pays for people to work, to reward people for work and to ensure that there is incentive to take chances”*. In effect we have an ideology of inequality where inequality is seen as not only inevitable but necessary.

Social partnership, power and ideology

So we can see the relationship between power and income inequality in representative democracy. But what of participative democracy? Does social partnership (at a national level in the form of collective wage bargaining) lessen or deepen that orientation to inequality. Three caveats before we begin this debate:

- social partnership does not necessarily mean participative democracy
- we still even after nearly a decade of involvement know little about what goes on behind the closed doors of partnership
- there is much emperors clothing and spin in relation to the outcomes of social partnership.

From what we do know and have observed the following is relevant in an assessment of whether social partnership works for or against inequality.

There appears to be evidence that social partnership stemmed growth of inequality relative to the experience in the UK, and within that there appears to be some evidence that social partnership has meant some protection of the concept of social solidarity. But it appears highly questionable as to whether social partnership can be a positive force for equality.

Features of recent deals include:

- A focus on percentage wage increases and quite low floors
- Tax reductions where 84% goes to top five deciles and less scope for social spending
- No great demand for tax reform, tax credits, refundable tax credits, minimum wage
- Childcare tax relief campaign
- No real pressure on indexation of social welfare and no large agenda for pensions
- Facilitation of fiscal restructuring in favour of employers

Some of this makes sense when one looks again at power and the question of membership and participation levels both within unions, farmers and employers, especially from a low-pay and gender perspective. Not that the community and voluntary pillar's participation has been flawless. While the pillar has brought about a more visible social inclusion agenda within social partnership, we have not necessarily delivered on that agenda; nor have we delivered a perfect model of equal participation within our pillar, we too have power inequalities.

- The much lauded £1.5 billion social inclusion budget was almost delivered in the first budget.
- Both PPF child benefit and some PPF adult social welfare targets have been exceeded or will be exceeded in the life time of the agreement.
- Many key issues like childcare were or remain unsatisfactorily resolved.
- There have precious little outcomes from the 41 negotiation processes in the PPF

Social Partnership as a model of participation has within it many features of inequality of participation. There are inequalities within pillars, between pillars, between government and pillars. There are serious gender inequalities. There is a very Dublin based process. The process is exclusive and private. Dissent is hidden. There is no ideological debate yet at the same time the apparent shared understanding reinforces dominant ideologies. Given all this, one would have to ask - if it is not an effective part of the solution is it part of the problem?

Conclusion

I set out to prove that there are power inequalities and income and wealth inequalities; I also wanted to prove that they are linked. I did this by focusing on how the political ideologies of those in different power structures come together in fiscal and wage policy to create unequal distributive outcomes that by and large work in favour of the rich and widen income inequalities.

While social partnership can in fact moderate inequalities, the degree to which the power dynamic within social partnership would ever chose to radically alter income distribution outcomes is highly questionable. The task of 'a lasting redistribution of resources' is unlikely to be delivered through social partnership.

In fact, there are significant time and opportunity costs imposed by participation in social partnership (and in the internal power dynamics of the community and voluntary pillar). This, coupled with social partnership's capacity and tendency to silence dissent and debate, means there are serious questions about the appropriateness of continued participation in social partnership.

On the other hand, there is potential within the dominant ideology to appeal to concepts like self-interest, social capital, social solidarity and sustainability to move some agendas for change within social partnership. However time should be spent wisely. And there should be alternative strategies for the larger agenda for change that can never be achieved through social partnership. These strategies must be able to influence all power bases and especially representative democracy. A key strategy will be to develop or redevelop social and political analysis skills and convince people that inequality does matter and can be tackled.

I finish with a wise word from Goldsmith:

“Strategies grossly misjudge the resistance that the class structure can offer to attempts to change it. There is a serious underestimation of the forces maintaining the situation in which change is sought relative to the force of the measures through which it is supposed change can be implemented”.

But this should not demoralise us, rather this should make us focus and organise!

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Mary Murphy

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The Role of the Community Sector in bringing about Social Change

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Introduction

The Community Workers Co-operative's Kilkenny conferences provide an important space for mapping developments in community work in Ireland. At the conference in 1989 the late Vincent Tucker delivered a paper entitled, 'Community Work and Social Change'. The significant difference in the input I was asked to make to this conference is the addition of the word 'sector' in the title. In my presentation I will try to remind ourselves of the story of the emergence of the 'community sector' in Ireland. In doing this I am conscious that as community activists/workers, we have not been good at recording our story and I am aware that many of the people who have contributed to these developments are present to correct or add to my version of this development. In speaking of the community 'sector' I mean the emergence of platforms or fora where diverse community organisations co-operate on an ongoing basis on a range of issues of relevance to the organisations. This development has emerged at the local and the national level and the experiences at both levels mirror each other. A common reflection on the challenges and frustrations of being involved in developing the community 'sector' could prove to be a source to strengthen and build solidarity among the people involved at the different levels. This paper attempts to begin this reflection.

Vincent Tucker in his presentation at the 1989 conference reminded us that we couldn't simply assume that community work is always a force for social change. He reminded us that "*community is not a precise term*" and the proliferation of the use of the word community in terms such as "*community development, community enterprise, community cooperative, community action, community policing, community radio and so forth*" illustrates the ambiguity associated with the word community. This ambiguity still exists and has been used to slow down or delay the emergence of a distinct community sector.

The attempt to seek a clear and distinct role for the community sector has been seen by some in the wider voluntary sector as exclusionary and the role currently held and sought for the community sector is not without its challengers. In mapping out the development of the community sector I will also try to articulate the distinct role that we sought for that sector.

The development of the community sector and the role sought for the sector has taken place alongside the development of local and national social partnership. Community organisations and community workers have responded to the challenges posed by social partnership arrangements. While there is disagreement among community organisations and community workers about the results from that engagement, our thinking and practice in relation to the development of the sector has been influenced by the reality of social partnership. This development of the sector alongside the partnership approach is reflected in this paper.

Finally in this paper I will try to identify some of the key challenges which I believe need to be met by the community sector if it is to successfully contribute towards bringing about positive social change.

From Community Work to National Networks to the Community Sector

The 1989 CWC Kilkenny conference mapped out some key developments in the emergence of community work in Ireland. A number of the conference papers defined the role of community work. Mary Whelan in her paper preferred the term community development and defined it as:

“The process of community development is to contribute to social change leading to social justice. The process of doing this involves participation and collective action by people in exerting control over economic, social and political issues that affect their lives. Because social change leading to justice involves recognition and action on the rights of marginalised groups, the central concern of community development is with action by these groups in achieving equality and full participation in society.”

She goes on to further clarify this definition by saying:

“... using development methods and techniques to organise local associations which then uses its collective power to keep out other citizens, ... has nothing in common with the values of community development.”

This defining of community work / community development is important as the definition contributes to being able to set a boundary that allows us to distinguish community work from other types of activities done in the community.

By the time of the 1994 CWC Kilkenny conference, the focus of attention for community work had shifted to partnership. The papers from this conference outline some of the key developments in community work in this period. The influence of the EU poverty programmes, the national agreements and the emergence of the Local Development Programme are highlighted. A number of the contributors note the tension that emerges from attempting to address local problems that have their causes in wider economic policies and call for the involvement of the community sector in national partnership arrangements as a part response to this problem. Also highlighted in the papers is the emergence of national anti-poverty networks including the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, the Irish Traveller Movement and the One Parent Exchange and Network. The emergence of these and other national anti-poverty networks is important in relation to the future shaping of the development of the national community sector. The papers by Brian Harvey and Niall Crowley from this conference were an important step in the debate in relation to developing structures at a national level that would assist in the emergence of a community sector.

The emergence of partnership approaches posed new challenges to the community workers and community organisations at local and national level. In the first instance it required that community organisations established mechanisms (fora, assemblies or platforms) that allowed them to operate collectively as a 'partner' in the process. This movement from individual organisations and networks to fora, assemblies or platforms is what I mean by the movement from being community workers and community organisations to being a community sector.

The emergence of the Community Platform in 1996 (and previously the National Economic and Social Forum 'Disadvantage Assembly', 1993) was a national response to this challenge. The Community Platform is open to national networks and organisations within the community sector that are engaged in combating poverty and social exclusion and promoting equality and justice and operating at a national level. Currently the Community Platform brings together some 24 national organisations. Participation in the Platform is based on the following criteria:

- A commitment to the participation of those who experience exclusion, poverty, inequality in the organisation
- Accountability back to the community being represented
- A focus on the collective interests of those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequality within the organisation
- That the organisation operates at a national level.

The argument for the granting of social partnership status to the Community Platform was based on the belief that the national social partnership arrangement should be open to including those who represented the interests of those who are experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequality. It was seen as enhancing representative democracy by including participation in public decision-making from that part of society that is not benefiting from how society is currently being organised. This argument meant that only a certain part of the wider community and voluntary sector was appropriate to this role.

The granting of social partner status to the Community Platform as part of the Community and Voluntary Pillar, soon after its formation and the amount of engagement that has required, put a huge onus on the organisations that participate in the Community Platform to communicate to their members the activities of the Community Platform. Many of the organisations were not in a position to respond to this challenge. As a result the national community sector developed without as strong a link to the local level as was desirable.

The experience of being part of the community sector

The experience of being part of the community sector has been a mixed blessing. I believe there is a strong correlation between the experience at the local and the national level. This was verified by the feedback from the regional seminars that were organised by the Community Platform and NESF 'Disadvantage Assembly' earlier this year. However, one of the biggest problems has been the failure to adequately link these national and local experiences. Issues that have arisen at both the local and the national level include:

- *The difficulty of defining the sector and who should organise the sector*
- The reality that those representing the interests of those experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequality are likely to be a more critical voice has meant that often there is an interest on the part of the public authority to broaden the base of the community organisations that are to participate in the process. In some instances the public authority has decided on the appropriate representation of the community sector either overlooking existing structures in the community sector or creating new structures. The state creation of a Community and Voluntary Pillar for national social partnership alongside the Community Platform that was created by the sector itself demonstrates this point. This creation of dual structures has led to considerable additional meetings and frustration for all those involved.

- *The difficulty of maintaining a strong focus on poverty, exclusion and inequality*

Arguments based on the importance of the inclusion of everybody in the process have meant that it has been hard to maintain a focus on poverty, exclusion and inequality. This argument arises from the lack of a clear theoretical framework that underpins the selection of who should be involved in the process.

- *The time and personnel commitments involved*

The amount of time needed for the involvement in these processes has caused difficulties for community organisations. This has in some instances meant time taken out from on the ground community work or the allocating of personnel for this work specifically. This sometimes leads to a distance between those engaged in the processes and other workers or activists in the community organisations. This can also contribute to a breakdown in solidarity amongst those involved in the community organisations.

- *The scarcity of resources to facilitate participation*

The engagement in partnership processes was very much an add-on to the other areas of work being undertaken by the community organisations. While the levels of funding available to community organisations has improved throughout the 1990s, little distinct funding was available to facilitate participation in the partnership processes. The absence of funding for the Community Platform has made the task of it communicating to the sector about its activities near impossible.

- *The difficulty of maintaining your agenda*

Often the experience of being involved in these partnership arrangements has been that your agenda and language gets taken over by the other partners without concrete actions resulting. This can mean that it is difficult to tell the difference between what you're saying as part of the community sector and what is being said by the other partners and yet you know that the actions are not reflective of your proposals. With everybody speaking a similar language it can be difficult to communicate your messages in the sound bites that may become available to you through the media. It then becomes difficult for those distant from the process to see a real difference between the partners.

- *The gap between what's agreed and what's delivered*

The commitment to introduce what has become known as RAPID was considered to be a major achievement by the community and voluntary pillar as part of the PPF agreement. Yet the way RAPID is being implemented has caused huge frustration for community organisations on the ground. This, in my view, is a common experience in these processes. The gap between what you thought you had agreement on and what is actually being delivered can be a source of huge frustration for the representatives of the community sector.

- *The difficulty of recognising concrete achievements*

The community sector has not been good at recognising the concrete achievements that have been made through the partnership processes. Often the achievements are way out of proportion to the sort of ambitions that we had going into the process. The introduction of the Equality Legislation, the reaching of the targets set under the Commission on Social Welfare Rates were not inconsiderable achievements. We are not as hard on ourselves when we stay outside of the processes and don't achieve, as we are when we fail to make progress and are part of the processes.

The Community Sector as Part of a Wider Sector

In making this input I am conscious that the community sector is part of a wider community and voluntary sector. Parts of that wider community and voluntary sector take up roles that are closely associated with the roles taken up by the community sector. There has been very clear co-operation between the organisations in the community sector and organisations in the voluntary sector. While it is possible to distinguish between the community sector and the voluntary sector it is also recognised that some organisations span both sectors. While trying to achieve maximum effectiveness through the co-operation between organisations across the community and voluntary sector, it is useful for the sake of clarity to also recognise that there are differences between community organisations and voluntary organisations.

The White Paper 'Supporting Voluntary Activity' sets out to develop the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector. The White Paper usefully records recent developments in the sector, attempts to define the sector and to look at the characteristics of the sector. This provides a useful starting point for trying to develop a clearer picture of the different elements that make up the community and voluntary sector. The community sector will need to engage with the work of the Implementation and Advisory Group created to follow up on the recommendations contained in the White Paper.

In more recent times, concepts such as *civil society*, *volunteering* and *social capital* are gaining more attention. These concepts apply to a much wider section of non-governmental organisations than just the community sector. However, confusion has arisen by using these concepts interchangeably with each other and with the notion of social partnership. This confusion has contributed to challenging the distinct role that has been sought by the community sector. Community sector practitioners will need to engage in the debate around these concepts and in the actions that follow on from them in order to ensure that these developments don't undermine the potential of the community sector to bring about social change.

Challenges for the future development of the Community Sector

If this emerging community sector is to grow to its full potential then key challenges will need to be met in the coming years. These challenges include:

- *Creating a greater link between the experience of community workers and activists at local and national levels*

This involves creating links between community sector structures emerging at local and regional levels and the Community Platform at national level. It means that the Community Platform must organise fora and meetings that encourage a wide range of people to be active in the work of the Community Platform. It also means that organisations participating in the Community Platform take more time to engage their members to participate more in the Community Platform. It also poses a challenge to local community workers and activists to create a space in their activities for linking into and engaging in national activities.

- *Ensuring the participation of people experiencing exclusion, poverty and inequality in the activities of the community sector*

The basis of the community sector is the participation of people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequality. Nothing should so take up the time of a community worker as to prevent them from engaging people who experience poverty, exclusion and inequality at all levels in the fight to bring about social change. We must ensure that our processes encourage the participation of people experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequality and ensure that through their participation they are further skilled to address the issues that cause them to experience disadvantage.

- *The development of a clear agenda for the community sector*

The agenda for the community sector needs to be more than a wish list from all of the organisations that make up the community sector. A clear agenda needs to emerge through engagement with community organisations that is both manageable and will have the support of the diverse organisations that make up the sector.

- *The development of a resourced Community Platform*

The Community Platforms at local and national levels need to develop levels of resources that will allow them to work efficiently in engaging people in their work, in developing and responding to policy concerns, in ensuring that they have an active communications strategy and to ensure that they can play an active role in public debates about social and economic policy.

- *The development of a range of approaches to address the concerns of the community sector*

The community sector must not only depend on social partnership or one model of social partnership to try having its concerns addressed. The community sector must engage in public and political debate, be a voice of protest, and engage in direct lobbying to have its needs met. The people in the community sector must ensure that there is adequate feedback so as to ensure that where we are successful in introducing new policies, we continue to engage to ensure that these policies are delivered in a way that is consistent with what was hoped that these policies might achieve at the beginning.

- *The development of greater solidarity*

The organisations that make up the community sector must ensure that they develop solidarity on the issues that are affecting other organisations in the sector. We must as organisations come to the defence of each other and, more importantly, to the defence of the people who are represented by our organisations.

- *The development of greater alliances*

The community sector on its own will not influence political opinion to the extent that is necessary to make the structural changes that are needed to bring about the type of society that we desire. The community sector organisations must develop alliances with other sectors of Irish society that will assist in bringing about this level of social change.

Conclusion

The community sector can play a role in bringing about social change. This role can only be successful if it manages to build the type of momentum for change that requires a political response. This is no small task. We cannot do it alone, nor can we just look at the work from the narrow perspective of Ireland. We must engage with the struggles of our colleagues in other European Union countries and further afield. The tragic events of recent days resulting in the loss of eight lives of immigrants in Wexford, the current battles causing countless deaths in the so-called 'war on terrorism', and the current attacks on Palestine remind us of the need to think globally while acting locally.

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Fintan Farrell

*Irish Traveller Movement
Community Platform*

Working in a Changed Environment Challenges Facing Community Work

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This CWC conference is being held on UN Human Rights Day, when our solidarity with human rights causes around the world and our commitment to a world where all human rights are acknowledged and honoured provides us with a fitting background for discussing the challenges that face us in community work here in Ireland.

I heard a radio report today about Kofi Annan receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace and one of the things he said struck me as being very pertinent to this discussion – human rights have to come before state rights. We are challenged very much by that statement as we remember that only yesterday in Rosslare, eight people died in a container trying to secure their human rights¹. I think that is a very sobering thought as we start our discussions about community work, but it also gives us a very crucial starting point for any discussion about collective solidarity and collective change.

Secondly I think it is important that today, we remember that 30 years ago this very hotel was the venue for the first Kilkenny poverty conference. That conference marked - as it was then called - *'The Rediscovery of Poverty in Ireland'*. I am not trying to pretend that poverty ever went away, or to be fair to the organisers of the conference that they ever thought it went away either, but I think what was important about that Kilkenny anti-poverty conference, and indeed the other two conferences that followed it, is that the Kilkenny processes and responses which began at that time started to challenge notions of the *'deserving poor'*. In today's language they began to look at rights, including the right of people experiencing poverty to participate. The first Kilkenny conference, and indeed the two that followed it, had a considerable influence on community work in the 1970s in Ireland.

Thirdly, I think it is useful to remind ourselves that this is our third Kilkenny community work conference associated with the Community Workers Co-operative. The Kilkenny conferences for me, if they have been about anything, have been about two very important things. They have been about challenge and they've been about change:

- about the sort of challenge and about the sort of change needed to achieve the outcomes that the people participating wanted
- about the sort of challenge and sort of change required in those involved in community work in order to bring about those outcomes.

They have also been about doing our own theory, our own policy work and then defining our own practice. One of the key features of community work in Ireland over the past decade has been the way in which we have struggled to do our own theory, to put together our own ideas for policy and in that context to define as far as possible our own practice. Practitioners, participants and projects will be stuck with a practice defined by others unless we continue to make our own theory.

So I will try to share some thoughts with you about the shape that I think we might put on some of the ideas, some of the theories and some of the policies that we might begin to generate from this Kilkenny conference.

First of all, I will try to define and discuss community work. It seems to me that one of the problems we face at the minute, despite the terms 'community work' and 'community' getting used to describe a variety of interventions, is that there isn't a lot of community work happening. Secondly, I will try to overview trends and issues in community work since the 1970s. Thirdly, I'll try to examine the current situation and, lastly, I'll try to raise a couple of questions for the future.

Community Work

Community work at its most descriptive could be called an 'intervention in the community' - an active intervention in the community to address alienation, inequality and injustice. It has long since been defined as '*the analysis of social and economic situations*' and '*the collective action for change*'. Now community work, in my view aims to be collective in analysis, collective in actions and collective in outcomes. It may have individual consequences but the aim of community work is not individual gain. If we start from there and if we think of what is practiced under the heading of community work, I think it is fair to say that even in programmes under which community work takes place, like, for example, the Community Development Support Programme, frequently individual outcomes are those that are sought and that are included into the understanding of community work. There is nothing wrong with such outcomes but I would suggest to you that they are not the core of what community work is about.

Participation

Community work is concerned with participation – and participation as distinct from consultation and volunteering. The term ‘volunteering’ is outmoded and outdated. In a world where the ‘deserving poor’ are no longer what we are dealing with, it should, in the interests of solidarity, be replaced with the term ‘participating’. This would make volunteers of all us who are participating to be parts of management; who are participating in running organisations; who are participating through making a contribution to a local committee. This would also allow for the inclusion of some of the more traditional roles concerned or documented as volunteering. Consultation, on the other hand, is often passed off as a community development approach when the local Partnership or the local County Development Board organises the meeting in the local hall, asks you what you want and then goes off and does whatever they felt like doing themselves in the first place.

Empowerment

Community work is concerned – or should be concerned - with empowerment. By empowerment I mean empowerment through consciousness raising to active analysis rather than keeping the people happy where they are, or finding ways to keep them happy where they are. I think empowerment, rather than ‘capacity building’, is particularly important at the moment. Don’t fool yourself – they are not the same. Capacity building is about stretching the elastic as far as it can go. Consciousness raising is about kicking the ball out into the next field and getting out yourself as well after it. If we continue to use the language of capacity building as a mechanism for getting the money for consciousness raising, what will happen, and what is happening already, is that not only are we getting funding for capacity building, but we are also only doing capacity building rather than consciousness raising.

Equality

Thirdly community work is concerned with equality - equality of access, equality of participation, equality of outcome and overall equality of condition, which can be achieved ideally through collective agency. By agency I mean the right of residents as well as citizens to participate actively in deciding and transforming their own reality. I borrow the term agency from the debates about citizenship. But I think the term citizenship needs a lot of revising before we can use it successfully again, as we face a situation in Europe where the numbers of residents are quickly becoming a large minority and the numbers of citizens are getting greyer.

Community Work and Community Development

The terms community work and community development are often used interchangeably. I would suggest that, particularly in Ireland, there's nothing wrong with that really. But community development is concerned with building active and sustainable communities, based on justice and respect, and removing the barriers to participation so that people can have a say in the decisions being made. Those processes can easily end up, and usually do, dealing with symptoms rather than causes. Because participation, as all of you and all of us who have struggled through the partnership frameworks of the last ten years know, does not always lead to justice or respect for the points of view of all of the participants, or for equality, or equity, or parity of esteem in the participative framework.

Creating the Conditions for Community Work

There is often confusion when we think about community work. If we look at what's been happening for the last decade, there's often confusion between creating the conditions for community work, doing community work, and managing the outcomes of community work. By creating the conditions for community work, I mean the sort of personal development, training, or education that's needed. Although I would say that training, education and personal development, unless there is a collective approach injected into them, have a much greater capacity to create the conditions for individual outcomes rather than collective outcomes.

Doing community work involves the processes I've spoken about. But managing the outcomes of community work – again a legitimate task in a community project, managing and co-ordinating the crèche that has emerged as a result of the struggle, or managing the enterprise, or managing the local employment scheme; or managing whatever else has emerged as a result of the struggle - is often confused with doing community work. I would suggest that a major challenge is to get back to the bit in the middle – the community work bit that's beyond the education and before managing the outcomes.

Transformation

Transformation is what community work is about for me, transforming reality and definitions of it. It's about working in the space between the intentions and the outcomes of policies. It's about acknowledging that localism is limited and incorporation is very easy. Transformation also needs collective accountability and collective solidarity and to ask questions about who gains from the processes of community work.

Being concerned with transformation, being situated 'in and against the state' poses particular challenges for those engaged in support, managing and monitoring community work. This is particularly so with the increased bureaucratisation of the monitoring processes which demands more and more financial accountability and leaves very little space for such agencies to operate independently as well as within the state.

Challenges

The challenges then that emerge for those of us engaged in community work have to do with doing it, being clear about it, being clear that what we are doing is community work and being clear when we are concerned about community work which might be transformational. Not everybody agrees that community work should be transformational. In looking at the transformational nature of community work, we need to be clear about the sort of change that is sought.

- Is it change in procedure and practice? There's nothing wrong with changing the way people go about their business. There's nothing wrong about organising a local community festival that generates a good local community spirit, because if community workers and community groups are not concerned with generating a sense of community then there's very little to the work we are involved in.
- Is it change in policy and change in law that copper fastens real changes for real people?
- Is it change in the overall thinking about an issue and change in the agenda?

Transformational change requires work on all those levels but in particular it requires attention to the third one. I'm reminded of the work I have been involved in over the years with Travellers in Ireland. Changes in procedures and practice could lead to halting sites; changes in law and policies could lead to anti-discrimination legislation. But changes in overall thinking and in the agenda are also about the acknowledgement of Travellers' way of life and the right of Travellers to be nomadic if they choose to be. I would suggest that this sort of transformational change, while it's on the agenda perhaps with regard to Travellers, still eludes us in a number of areas. Perhaps in searching for it we are tilting at windmills – but unless we tilt at them I think change on either of the other two levels will be inconsequential for the people we're working with.

Trends and Issues in Community Work since the 1970s

The poverty focus of the 1970s, emerging from the Kilkenny conferences, was partnered by a focus on participation and challenge, which came from the participants in the first European Anti-Poverty Programme. Since the 1970s, Irish community work has been focused on policy, however the concern with individual poverty as well as collective rights has tended to cause some confusion which is even present perhaps in the definition used by the Community Development Support Programme. It is also present in the work often undertaken by the Health Boards. In either case it is understandable given the remit and funding backgrounds of both Departments, but discussions about these definitions do need to be re-opened.

The 1980s saw community work as a site for solutions and also as a move to issue-based approaches. As those of you brave enough to acknowledge that you were actually around in the 1980s will remember, in the 1980s there was no money. There was no poverty programme until the mid 1980s and emigration rather than immigration was the issue of the day. So solutions to unemployment were being sought through training and through targeted responses in local communities.

The 1990s saw probably one of the most dramatic changes in community work with the development of a funding infrastructure, particularly through the Community Development Programme (now the Community Development Support Programme) and the Local Development Programme (now the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme). However, I would suggest that the Local Development Programme has had a profoundly liberal focus dependent on collaboration and integration rather than contest with regard to the issues being discussed, while the Community Development Programme has had some problems with its inclusion of individuals in a community work process as the key objectives rather than on positive outcomes for communities.

The 1990s also marked a shift in community work and in the discussions about it, moving from poverty to social inclusion. That shift to social inclusion was concerned with a number of things, with redistribution, with a moral underclass, with integration so that society became more cohesive and, to some extent, concerned with social transformation. The 1990s also saw community work as building community and social solidarity as opposed to being a site for solutions.

Communities, and community work, were seen as now needing to be working:

- initially towards social cohesion, an agenda not disputed by anyone at a time of high unemployment.
- towards social order, a somewhat questionable agenda probably not contested enough by any.
- and, for some people, towards social justice.

The mechanism whereby social solidarity towards these arenas of cohesion, order and justice was activated was a partnership mechanism. The partnership mechanism that community groups entered into was one that was seen to be based on participation and work for change through collaboration, through campaign and through contest. In effect, as has already been pointed out, most of the partnership mechanisms either at local or at national level in the last decade relied only on collaboration. Collaboration between a number of actors, including the less powerful community groups and community sector, was adequate to achieve the social cohesion necessary to get people into work, but not at all adequate to achieve the social justice which was the ultimate concern of many who engaged in partnership.

The local and national structures in the 1990s, through which partnership was engaged with, posed their own internal contradictory challenges, somewhat reflecting the diverse concerns with social cohesion and social justice. To name but a few of those, at national level, one is talking about the existence of both a Community Platform and a Community and Voluntary Pillar while at local level you're talking about the existence of Community Fora, Community Platforms, Community Development Boards, and a community sector.

Current Situation for Community Work

We move then into the new millennium, into a situation where another shift was happening. From 1985 onwards an agenda that was concerned with equality, rights and anti-discrimination began to emerge. However, we need to question ourselves as to the transformational capacity of such an agenda. It wasn't an agenda that was widely contested by the state. It was one that in some ways tended to stop at re-distribution. Maybe those of us who struggled to secure Equal Status legislation and Employment Equality legislation, and who worked hard on the Task Force on Travellers, on the Commission for People with Disabilities and on the various women's programmes, need to think a little bit about this. Transformation needs a transformational analysis and demands vertical as well as horizontal work.

This vertical and horizontal work needs to be framed for the new context in institutional, as well as our own global, links. If we look back again at the 1980s, we will find that through that era, community work was well linked globally. In the 1990s, community work was also linked globally but the links were to global institutions like the United Nations and the European Union. In the context of the new millennium we need to continue our links to global institutions. However, those of us who have struggled through European Union organisations and more recently through global structures like the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, will be very clear that there are limits to what can be achieved through global institutions and that we need to re-invent our own direct global links and global networks through which we can learn the lessons of what has been tried, tested and has been transformational elsewhere, rather than trying to re-invent the wheel here.

The new context also has a re-framed agenda. Economic, political and social strategies with marginalised people, the old male Marxist agenda, need to be put alongside the real concerns about culture and identity. The two need to be integrated. Culture and identity brings up a number of questions we have already looked at in community work; questions about the roles of men and the roles of women; questions about racism which have long been part of our thinking; questions about disability and questions about class, as well as questions about other forms of multiple identity.

The new agenda will also need new methods – methods which go beyond the search for social rights of the 20th century – methods which, as well as horizontal and vertical practice demands, acknowledge the contradictions contained in those demands. These contradictions include the need to look at the way in which, on the one hand we're looking for a strong state to meet needs, and on the other we want the state to share power and to operate in a different way. But we do not want the state to run away and sell the family silver in the way that the government have been attempting to do over the last while.

In this Cooke's tour, I have attempted to contextualise my remarks by placing this conference in the context of today and of the happenings in the South East, in the context of the poverty conferences in Kilkenny and in the context of trying to 'do' theory towards creating challenge and change. I've said that community work is about analysis and action for change, about participation and empowerment. It is fundamentally collective - perhaps with consequences for individuals, but aiming to have outcomes for groups. I've raised questions about what's possible within such a definition and I've raised questions also about the limitations of the liberal agenda.

I'm not suggesting that everyone needs to conform to a transformational agenda but I am saying that the liberal agenda does have limitations and does leave us with the status quo as it stands.

I've looked briefly at community work since the 1970s and in particular at community work in the 1990s, as it became a sort of struggle towards social solidarity through partnership for social cohesion and, in the heads of many, social justice. I've suggested that the project is about transformation. The arenas in which we engage are less of an issue when the project is about transformation. But such a project does demand engaging and managing things differently. Through the 90s, we got to have a say. We don't like what happened in the process of having a say, but the last thing I think is worth doing, is complaining about the amount of time it takes to sit at the table where we might have a say rather than about what happens when we attempt to have our say.

Activating our voice then needs to be about exposing awkward political questions rather than managing diversity, exposing questions rather than obscuring them. This is the tradition that has informed previous Kilkenny conferences – the tradition of activating our voice, the tradition of exposing questions and acting on them rather than obscuring them. This is the tradition which has also informed the work of the Community Workers Co-operative and it is the tradition which informed so many of the voices that aren't with us today – Sinead Brady who struggled to put such things on the agenda of the first Poverty Programme in the 1970s, Theo Ryan who struggled to inform the debate about employment and community work through community workshops in the 1980s, Vincent Tucker, who struggled to keep us focusing on the global as well as the local, and my own dear John O Connell.

¹ The bodies of eight people were discovered in a container lorry in Rosslare Harbour in December 2001. They were asylum-seekers who had suffocated while trying to reach Ireland.

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Stasia Crickley

Dept. Applied Social Studies NUI Maynooth

Defining a Rights Agenda for a Sustainable Future

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I want to start off today by raising a number of points that have emerged from this conference so far. Lots of the focus of the past two days has been about what is happening 'out there' in the broader social sphere - a bit of a global or macro analysis, if you like.

Concerns were expressed about globalised capital, how that frames our work and the frustration arising from trying to grapple with something which is so huge and all-encompassing. We also looked at models of development and how we as community workers try to address some of the social inequalities that derive from a model of development that is economy-driven.

We laid out issues arising from the North-South global relationship i.e. the northern hemisphere and the southern part of the globe, and what that means in terms of citizens and non-citizens. This in turn brought up issues of racism and multiculturalism. Then, a little bit closer to home, we looked at where and how we might better impact in terms of social partnership - should we be in or should we be out, or should we be in both spaces?

Perhaps too little time was dedicated to looking internally - how we organise. How community work is capitalised or resourced; and also looking at the blockages and the primary issues within the sector. I will return to these matters in a minute.

Macro Issues

Let us look at those bigger macro issues for a moment. These are big external factors and we are only a small fish in a very large pond. But we do have some control, and where we have control we need to ask ourselves some questions. In terms of global capital, do we possess an economic analysis that critiques the neo-liberal market model? Do we have an alternative model of development? If we are criticising what is there, do we have other options? And if we do have an alternative do we put it out? Do we teach it to people in our training courses in order to develop good arguments and do we skill people to operate and to advance those arguments in their implementation of community work?

Again, in contrast to the current model of development, have we outlined what sustainable development looks like? We are critical of unsustainable development; but what is sustainable development? What is it in reality? In a post CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) scenario have we a notion, for instance, of what rural development should be? We know it is not purely agricultural development and we are not in favour of what is there - for example agribusiness, which takes no account of sustainability - but what are we proposing to put in its place? Have we sought alliances with the Green movement? Have we forged the type of tight alliances that will enable us to advance agendas with other progressive organisations?

In terms of national social partnership: have we built structures that are resourced and capable of developing national agendas or are we still operating in a very piecemeal way? In terms of Northern Ireland, have we utilised the human rights and legal frameworks developed under the Peace Process for effective work in the South and the North, and have we thought about how best to develop that type of work? That might very well be the location where we should be looking to develop our rights-based approaches.

Rights-based Approach

The rights-based approach that we articulate is usually associated with social, cultural and economic rights rather than civil and political rights, which are classical liberal rights that include private property and individual liberty. These rights are sometimes the bedrock of quite right-wing or neo-liberal parties. So civil and political rights are something that conservative governments or conservative movements are quite comfortable with in many ways. However, with social, cultural and economic rights one begins to forge out into arenas of poverty, culture, ethnicity and development. Going down this route also means developing some kind of group rights or collective rights – so classic notions of civil rights and this broader idea of social, cultural and economic rights are a good bit different.

One of the rationales for shifting to a rights-based approach is the reality that community work must operate within a range of contexts that are normally externally created (and only rarely self-created). For instance, in Ireland, community work is forced to operate within a regime of global capitalism. Whether it subscribes to that regime or not is irrelevant. It is an operational reality. However, there are other contexts that can be self-set. For instance, whether we choose to operate from a reformist ethos within the existing market model of capitalism, or not.

This means choosing between operating within a charity model or adopting a more radical redistribution approach, thus putting oneself into an oppositional role. We have that choice. Each of these choices involves the adoption of a set of concepts, language, methodologies and goals that are quite different. Thus the concept of social corporatism – taking this as the term that best describes the European notion of partnership – highlights the concept of social inclusion/exclusion.

The language that came to us, via the EU Structural Funds, used words like participation, empowerment and building capacity. As I say, the methodology was social partnership and the goal was social inclusion, i.e. bringing people in from the periphery of society. While this was not quite the equality we had in mind it wasn't too bad either. It certainly was a considerable shift from notions of poverty and charity and there was every indication that we were on a bit of a curve towards the ultimate objective, equality of condition. Unfortunately, in the last number of years, we seem to have slipped back from that goal. Now the dominant concepts indicate a shifting back to poverty. Consultation has replaced participation, and measuring consistent poverty and integrating services is considered more important than building the consciousness or the capacity of social excluded groups to make demands. The goal has shifted from social inclusion to better service targeting. Clearly there is a need for something better, to get back to the days of inclusiveness and equality as dominant themes. So this rights-based approach offers some possibilities.

The rationale for getting engaged in a rights-based approach is based on the fact that the dominant groups in society lay down a framework to justify or legitimise their regime. This results in a set of rules and guiding principles being established, which are then adopted in law. Although these largely reflect and prioritise the interests of the governing elite they also need to convey a sense of fairness and good process. This provides a basis for opposition. In other words where laws are favourable or where protective articles are in place, such as human rights conventions, they can be exploited for gain. What this means for us is that we need to begin to use different language. We cease, for instance, to use words like 'poverty' and we begin to talk about 'rights'. We develop practice guidelines and put them out through seminars and workshops to show people how to utilise rights-based approaches locally. We frame all our policy positions – education, health or housing – in terms of a human rights framework. We build alliances to enable us to develop those frameworks. And we shift from being process focused to being outcome focused, so we are clear about what we want from the very beginning.

We are clear that education, that health and a decent income are basic rights and then we focus on strategies to achieve that. In action terms a rights approach is more outcome focused than process focused. So, if you were approaching something like the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, instead of getting caught up in convoluted arguments about relative poverty and levels of sustained poverty, you will have a clear line going in that it's basically about equalising people's positions in society. That makes it much clearer and much more satisfactory to work in. I think we have to try it.

Community Sector

However, I think this is something that is going to have to be teased out in the coming months and in the coming year. Whatever approach we adopt we have to ask ourselves the question: *'do we have the capability to benefit from the particular thrust that we take?'*

But I believe there are a number of related items and this is where I want to get back to the internal - the bits that we can influence and the bits that we can shape. For instance, in terms of the community sector, I don't know how many times I've heard people disputing the existence of a community sector. It's quite disheartening when trying to build a movement for change to deny or be denied a collective existence. The community sector is a sector. It is organisationally and ethically linked. It is not an organisation, but it is definitely a sector and that is why people are here today sharing this knowledge, because it is a sector.

Secondly, there is a real dilemma around the state's involvement in the community sector. What has emerged from this ownership is a re-defining of community work as something that is spatially focused and mainly about self-help or services delivery. This is something that we really need to watch. The legitimacy of the sector is contested and raised as an issue while the ideology of volunteerism is resurrected and put out for consumption. The quizzing of paid community workers and the loading of statements about the 'poverty industry' are indicative of this. So communities or residents are presented as a purer form of life than a community sector that is organised and able.

There is a lot of this ideology around. At ground level, the focus of community work is maintained at a neighbourhood level and the scale of projects, for instance the Community Development Support Programme, are still ridiculously ineffective. The CDSP prevails with small-scale projects that are very limited in what they can achieve. Why can't we have bigger projects? Why don't we recognise the enormity of the task and why isn't that recognised in the funding and the type of projects that are set up?

I think if we look at where community work happens now, we will see that things have changed considerably. Lots of community work is now located in the local authorities, where a lot of its focus is in bolstering a floundering representative system. Again, in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs' Community Development Support Programme, there are great situations imposed that force them into neighbourhood work that has no parallel policy connection. In the Local Development Programme many partnerships focus on delivery rather than on building an autonomous, independent, well-resourced community sector. The National Networks are at a more policy or strategic level – so there is some relative autonomy there. But again, there would be great concern that an agency like the Combat Poverty Agency has failed to grow at the same pace as the investment in anti-poverty and community work would justify. So maybe we should have been pushing for a more dynamic or more developed Combat Poverty Agency in some of the social partnership negotiations we have pursued.

Another point is the lack of connectedness between local community work and national policy focused work. The state is definitely more dominant at local level. If we look at various programmes, the state is increasingly more directive in how it deals with, say, support agencies who in turn are expected to be very directive with the projects that they support. There's a tremendous difficulty for people in this situation to carve out a space where they can do community work whether that is within support agencies, CDPs or local authorities. Many support agencies, for instance, resisted the Department around policy workers but were frustrated in this. So it's quite difficult to carve out that space when there isn't a lot of room for manoeuvre.

We need to remember in all of this that the value of community work is in its opposition, its ability to be a critical voice naming needs and inequalities. Community work cannot be controlled by the state, it is a contradiction in terms. Maybe the sector needs to take on the state around this. This means some focused discussion and the development of a strategy within the sector and some mobilisation of resources behind it. It is something that needs to happen fairly rapidly.

Lastly, we need to revisit and restate the fundamentals of community work. Community work is essentially about social change. It is about moving from the imperfect to the perfect. Resistance is a given - if you have a comfortable relationship with all and sundry it usually means you're doing nothing. Again, it's impossible to confine community work to a local setting.

The process of community work is a collection of socio-economic analysis, consciousness raising, collectivisation of needs and the development strategies to achieve agreed objectives. Inevitably, this will lead to policy related activities and links being developed into national organisations and local networks. So community activity cannot remain solely within a local context and must inevitably engage at the policy level as well.

So, in conclusion, if I haven't said much about a rights-based approach, it's because it needs to be developed, and we need to test it and to become a bit more assertive in what we are trying to attain. At a sector level we need the skills and knowledge required for an impact on macro factors. Globalised capital is probably not sustainable in the longer term but what are the alternatives? We need to come up with some alternatives. Rights-based approaches will lead us towards new goals which will be contested. There will be a shift from consensus and negotiation to rights that are not negotiable and we need to be prepared for that and to begin to develop different strategies and different language around that. We need to connect the sector at local and national level, to loosen state constriction and promote greater cohesion within the sector around this agenda. I think we have a common view around this here today. We need to re colonise our own discipline and assert key principles again. We need an awareness of our own power and a better analysis of the state so we can develop effective strategies in more challenging areas. We are existing in a hegemony of individualism and consumerism, where wealth creation is the dominant focus and re-distribution is no longer on the agenda. We need to get that principle back up there again.

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Aiden Lloyd

Community Workers Co-operative Central Group

A Community Work Framework for a Sustainable Ireland – A Discussion Document –

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Introduction

This conference is taking place in a context of frustration about continuing inequality, poverty and social exclusion while Ireland is richer than ever. This frustration was evident during the regional seminars leading up to this conference and in the discussions here yesterday. There are more ‘community workers’ than ever on the ground, working harder than ever yet nothing is changing. If community work is about transforming society, why has so little changed? It seems that most of this energy is going to managing inequality and poverty while the structure that causes the problems lingers on. We rightly focus on the socially excluded, but too often not on the mechanisms that cause this exclusion.

In this paper I will explore the current situation, and in the process reiterating some of what is said elsewhere at this conference – how wealth and power are concentrated, inequality deepened, and how such a situation is unsustainable. Even though the title of this paper refers to a ‘Sustainable Ireland’, it is not possible to consider this without taking cognisance of the global situation and the extent to which that determines what happens in Ireland.

Sustainable Development and Sustainability are terms and concepts bandied about more and more these days – I’ll briefly look at how they might relate and add value to community development.

The point was made during the conference that it’s ok, even necessary, to not have the answers. That to be able to articulate the appropriate questions would be a good start. This presentation is not trying to present any answers, but rather add to the discussion and look at possible ways forward.

Current Model of Development

We know all the facts and figures showing the increasing inequality in Irish society – the widening gap between rich and poor, the two-tier health, education and accommodation system. Mary Murphy discusses this in her paper and several reports highlight this polarisation of Irish society – astronomical house prices vs. longer housing lists and increased homelessness; those who can afford it getting decent health care, those not, suffering pain and long waiting times for hospital care, etc.

There is an almost unquestioned acceptance that the neo-liberal model of development – economic growth and competitiveness as the holy grail – is the only game in town. Neo-liberal is a nice phrase meaning ‘new freedoms’, but it is about freedom of financial capital only. Any negative fallout or loss of social or cultural freedom, such as poverty, homelessness, or rural decline, is unfortunate and needs to be dealt with, but does not call the model of development into question. Yet, if the recent years of the Celtic Tiger have shown anything, it is that this model of development does not deliver on poverty and inequality. Not only this, but, as Mary Murphy states when quoting the Minister of Social, Community and Family Affairs, it needs inequality to function. The basic logic requires some people to be able to amass vast wealth, and concentrate power, and others who will provide cheap labour and be motivated to work hard. In fact it is the antitheses of the vision of equality as expressed by Jean Jacques Rousseau:

‘no citizen shall ever be wealthy enough to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself’.

Within this neo-liberal model of development, social and environmental concerns can be addressed, but only if they don’t rock the ‘Ireland Inc’ boat too much. Profit and value for money are all important, and the myth that everything must submit to the market is unquestioned - and it is a myth to be ignored when necessary for those with power. This short-sighted approach is reflected all around us – privatisation of public services and enterprises, Public Private Partnerships, all without any analysis of their sustainability or social impact. Narrowly defined ‘value for money’ is sufficient. Why not ‘value for people’? Work on the National Spatial Strategy, which is supposedly based on sustainable development principles, to date has clearly adopted an ‘economic growth will solve everything’ approach.

We have made some gains. Social inclusion is now an objective of the National Development Plan and there is a stated commitment to poverty proofing and equality proofing.

However, those of us working in the sector know that this is not being reflected on the ground. There are now more so-called community workers than ever, yet things are not changing. We're busy, but to what extent are we busy managing social exclusion and attending meetings, rather than challenging the causes of exclusion and transforming society? Are we, to quote a CWC publication, being co-opted "*to bring about a more effective delivery of services to those most in need, or is it about a redistribution of power to ensure the full inclusion of the marginalised? While the former may very well be altruistic it is a 'donated' improvement without any ability to be sustained because there is no alteration in power differentials*" (Partnership, Participation and Power. CWC 2000).

I would also ask the question, even within social partnership, are there decision making arenas that we should be engaging in and are not? I know the last thing any of us need is more committees and meetings – but should there be community sector input into Industrial Development policy, the National Roads Authority, discussions around privatisation or Public Private Partnerships? At the moment we are not included in these arenas, yet decisions made there have major impacts on social exclusion, poverty and inequality.

Ireland operates within a global economy in which there is total dominance of information technology enhanced neo-liberal ideology. It is now so dominant that its adherents refuse to even acknowledge it as an ideology – it's a fact of life. You might as well complain about the weather – there might be floods and storms, but you just have to deal with it. What Kieran Allen refers to in his book as 'gritty realism'. As far as these neo-liberal economists are concerned the debate is over '*All the big questions have been answered*' (Fukuyama).

The impact of this approach is even more stark and clear at the global level where it causes poverty, inequality, environmental damage, and undermines democracy, while concentrating wealth and power in the hands of small elites. Andy Storey quotes some relevant figures on this in his paper.

Many people speak of their concern about what is happening in the world and in Ireland, but feel that 'it's too big' an issue to deal with. There is a feeling of helplessness and voicelessness. There are no alternatives on offer, or leadership to find alternatives. And also, it must be said, a feeling that expressing these opinions publicly is somehow not appropriate. Even those who protested in Seattle and Genoa are a diverse group, many without a clearly articulated vision of the alternative. Also, for many of them it appears to be about the individual rather than developing a collective approach.

Sustainability

The terms 'Sustainable' and 'Sustainable Development' have been around for a while, and are much used these days. The common definition used for Sustainable Development is from Brundtland '*development that meets the needs of today, without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their needs*'. It is usually understood as development that integrates social, environmental and economic concerns.

From a community work perspective it is of interest in that, especially since the UN Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio in 1992, Sustainable Development entails a strong anti-poverty, equality focus and sees participatory democracy, especially of excluded communities, as fundamental. This is particularly the case in the 'global south' where environmental and anti-poverty concerns are very clearly linked, and where Sustainable Development is often seen as a rallying point against neo-liberal globalisation (e.g. Earth Charter). In much of Europe it has a strong environmental focus and in some aspects can have a 'greening the rich' element. Nonetheless, countries like Spain and Portugal see it as a force for democratisation – especially through Local Agenda 21.

Our own National Sustainable Development Strategy (1997) recognises the importance of equality, participation, and even adopts a rights based approach:

“The Government affirms that:

- every person is entitled to enjoy a clean, healthy environment*
- meeting the needs of the present in a sustainable way involves equity in the access to and use of resources as well as equitable opportunities in decision-making and to achieve economic and social progress”.*

I would see Sustainable Development as Community Development with a strong environmental dimension. Mind you, there are many different interpretations of Sustainable Development and it can be argued that the term has been co-opted by so many different interests as to be meaningless. Nonetheless, it seems clear that by any standard Ireland's current model of development is unsustainable.

Of the three pillars of sustainable development:

- Socially* - we are becoming a more and more divided society as already described in the paper by Mary Murphy with increasing problems concerning housing/accommodation, health care, etc.

- *Environmentally* - while Ireland still has a relatively good quality environment there is clear evidence that this quality is declining – water pollution, declining air quality, soil erosion, waste crisis, etc.
- *Economically* – we have proven very efficient at generating wealth over recent years. However, we are very poor at sharing this wealth, and there are serious concerns that the uses to which this wealth is being put is likely to undermine even our economic sustainability.

Given that Sustainable Development requires integration of all three of these aspects, it is clear that the current model of development pursued is not sustainable. Eliminating poverty, promoting equality, redistributing wealth, protecting the environment are all at odds with the neo-liberal short-term profits at all costs approach.

It is important to note that the sustainable development movement is an example of other, more positive, forms of ‘globalisation’ – global initiatives that do try to promote social and/or environmental sustainability – the Earth Summit in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the UN Convention on Social and Economic Rights, the recent World Conference Against Racism. All of these reflect attempts to promote values other than profit, and offer opportunities to promote an alternative agenda, and to build alliances around doing this.

Community Work and Sustainable Development

From a Community Workers Co-operative perspective, while we don’t particularly engage in environmental issues *per se*, we do acknowledge the importance of environmental sustainability and we do recognise the links between the environment and poverty and exclusion. Community work principles are clearly central to achieving true Sustainable Development.

Community work would acknowledge that economic activity and development is essential to a sustainable society – but this must be responsible activity based on social, economic and cultural rights, not economic development for it’s own sake and at all costs. Whereas the current model is based on inequality, community work would strive for one based on promoting equality.

Without trying to present a blueprint for the perfect society, some of the key points we might seek in such a model are:

- Adequate income for all to live lives of dignity.
- A right to access to services such as education, health, decent, affordable, appropriate accommodation.
- A right to participation in decision-making, and this right not based on belonging to any elite or group.
- Embracing and valuing diversity.
- An education system focused on valuing diversity and the provision of life-long learning.
- A system of governance based on participation and ownership of governance.
- A health system where communities are active agents in managing their own health status.
- Baseline standards of service provision that protect the most vulnerable.
- Governance and service delivery able to adapt and learn from experience.
- Supports to enable the most vulnerable and marginalised in society and to ensure that these voices are heard.
- Economic decision-making that takes proper cognisance of social and environmental concerns.

Ways Forward

The current model of development is not sustainable. It stands indicted over the recent years of the Celtic Tiger, where despite its so-called economic success it has worsened inequality, poverty and exclusion, as well as degrading the environment. If it cannot address social issues when it is 'successful' what chance does it have in more difficult times? Yet, even though there is widespread popular concern, it seems to be unacceptable to challenge this consensus – those who try are branded 'creeping Jesus's' or 'pinko-lefties'. With no mainstream political party deviating from this consensus to show leadership there has never been a greater need for a strong independent community sector to articulate these issues.

So, what can the community sector do to promote a truly Sustainable Ireland? There are challenges and tasks, many of which have been raised during this conference:

- First of all, the community sector must articulate a strong independent voice.
- While continuing to target those living in poverty and social exclusion we must strengthen our focus on those processes and structures that cause this exclusion.
- We need better analysis of the current model of development (both nationally and globally) on:
 - ∞ How it concentrates wealth and power.
 - ∞ How it maintains and deepens inequality, and in fact depends on inequality.
 - ∞ How it is inherently unsustainable
 - ∞ How decisions are made.
- For this we need to develop our skills and understanding of economics.
- We must make this analysis accessible to communities and community workers on the ground and indeed to the public at large. The point was made during the conference about the need to '*rediscover resistance*'. I would argue that this is not enough – we need be proactive and to show leadership. As another conference participant said, we are **not** the resisters, we are the ones promoting positive social change.
- The capacity of our members to use this analysis to critique local economic development and decision-making needs to be developed.
- We need to develop our analysis of the state sector, how it operates and what are the blockages to implementation of agreed programmes.
- We must develop positions and strategies that seek to integrate economic and social development.
- We must become more strategic in what we address and where we engage locally, nationally and internationally.
- We need to develop complementary strategies to social partnership e.g. Legal (both national and international), Political, Media, International, Grassroots.
- Alliances must be built with other sectors with similar concerns – Legal, Political, International, Environmental, Trade Union, and Academic.

Conclusion

Sustainable development is constantly referred to as something to which we all aspire to. Yet, despite this Ireland continues to adopt and promote a model of development that is inherently unsustainable. The fact that this model is also dominant globally is a cause of even more concern rather than of solace. As a society we appear addicted to that which is most destructive to us. The damage we are causing our society and the environment is obvious all around us, yet we appear unable to take the necessary actions to do anything about it.

At its core, community work is about social change, and it is clear that social change, based on values of justice, equality, human rights, participation and respect for the environment is desperately needed in the modern world. At the moment there is seemingly insurmountable resistance to this change. The challenge to us as community workers is to be unambiguous about what we stand for and to develop clear strategies and alternatives for achieving this change. Conferences such as 'Wealth, Power and Inequality' are essential tools in developing and articulating such alternatives, but we must use the analyses, solidarity and energy we get from them to influence our work in meaningful and effective ways.

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Seán Regan

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Further Reading:

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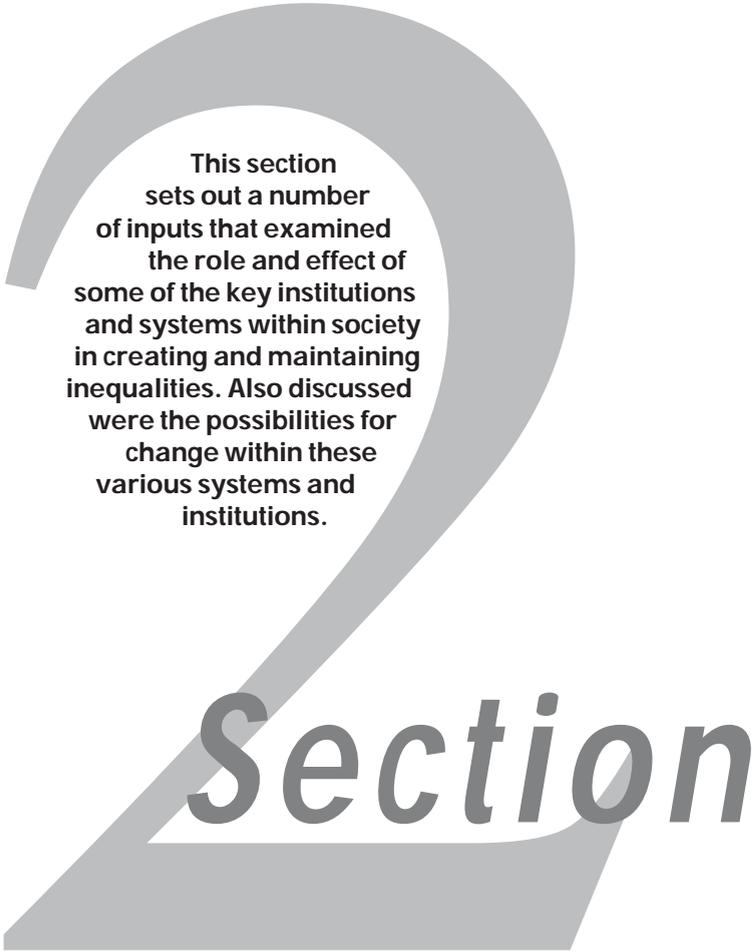
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This section sets out a number of inputs that examined the role and effect of some of the key institutions and systems within society in creating and maintaining inequalities. Also discussed were the possibilities for change within these various systems and institutions.

Section

Introduction

A key part of the Kilkenny conference was participation in a wide range of workshops by the conference participants. Each workshop began with a short presentation on the relevant theme. Those inputs that were provided in the form of a paper are presented below.

Is the political system reinforcing inequality?



The theme of this discussion implies that ‘the political system’ may reinforce rather than reduce or eliminate inequality. We need to ask whether, or in what respects, or to what extent, this is true. Are there not different viewpoints, competing policies, and conflicting policy objectives, which imply that the political system is a contested space? And are there not different concepts of equality and inequality?

If so, it might help if we first distinguished between different aspects of the political system, from which to examine dynamics. Then, it might be useful to explore the type of discourse on inequality we have had in Ireland, to ask what its limitations are, and how it might be developed.

What different aspects of the political system need consideration?

I would suggest that it might help if we analyse what we mean by the ‘political system’.

Does it mean ‘the state’? Does the state reinforce inequality, and if so, in what sense may we resort to the state in order to reverse inequality or generate equality? The ‘vices’ of a state are more often couched in terms of its propensity to coerce rather than generate inequality (which is often achieved by the market), but this capacity arises from the centralisation of power, which can also be the basis of the power to redistribute resources. The welfare state is a good example.

Or does the political system mean ‘politics’, the political party system? In this case, the ideologies of different parties provide the key to their propensity to reinforce or combat inequality. In Irish political culture, the range of political ideology is limited, without a strong left and, until recently, a strong, ideologically driven, neo-liberal right.

Or does the political system here extend to politics in the wider sense of social movements or to organised ‘private publics’ that are not directly involved in parliamentary politics but are of significance in participative structures?

Trade unions and other organisations of civil society are significant players in shaping public policy as it shapes patterns of inequality. Does this mean that this sector is more egalitarian than the party political establishment? One can point to social movements or currents of public opinion ranging over such areas as gender, age, environment, ethnicity or disability that have become more involved in social policy, sometimes with an explicit emphasis on equality agendas. While this sector's credibility and influence has surely grown in recent times, possibly in contrast to the falling stock of party-politics, what is its overall direction, logic and impact? Is it indeed coherent or cohesive?

And, finally, does the political system extend to the overall institutional architecture of policy making in Ireland, taking into account all three dimensions? Social partnership acts to connect these sub-dimensions together in various ways, and clearly cannot be ignored. Indeed, it has become so central that we sometimes use, as a litmus test, the impact this or that actor has on social partnership, as though that is a proxy for what is good policy. What are the dynamics of this complex and very centralised institutional arrangement? Does the parliamentary subsystem still hold the key to decision-making?

Is there a consensus between the political parties and the non-party political forces and interests ranged around each other in partnership? Is the whole process held together by heavy reliance, if not over-reliance, on the new-style of 'can-do' civil servants? If so, is the over-riding philosophy one of a pragmatic attempt to reconcile all sides? And if so, is this sustainable?

Discourses on equality: what are their limitations?

In addition to these questions on the nature of the political system, we need to explore questions on the nature of equality and inequality. There has been considerable political discourse - in the state bureaucracy, the party political system and more particularly in the civil society / social movements' sector around certain themes, one being social inclusion and poverty. Somewhat distinct from this is the discourse around equality of opportunity or treatment. From an egalitarian perspective these may be viewed as self-limiting.

Tackling poverty or social exclusion is limited to removing the worst extremes of poverty. Equality of treatment tends to be limited to the treatment of groups or categories that have been at a disadvantage - structurally - compared to their counterparts, for instance, women compared to men, disabled compared to non-disabled, Travellers as compared to settled people. This discourse on equal treatment may be limited, in different respects in each area, in relation to how effectively the issue of socio-economic equality, or equality of condition, is addressed.

One possible way to address the overall question of this workshop might be to examine the sources, from which emanate the kind of ideas that challenge current limits on policy or political discourse. For example, who is proposing ideas that seek to place equality of condition or principles of universality in a more central position? Moreover, one also needs to ask what actions are afoot, and what ideas are afloat, and from what source are they emanating, that appear to be going in the opposite direction? In other words, far from deepening the discourse on equality, some may intent on further restricting it.

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The Role and Effect of the Economic System in creating, changing or reinforcing inequalities within society



Three major tendencies can be identified in the present economic system.

First, inequality and class polarisation. In 1960, the average income of a Chief Executive Officer in the US was 41 times that of the average employee. Today it is 691 times.

As global capitalism ages, the tendencies that make for inequalities grow stronger.

The Celtic Tiger is the supreme example. It has been the most successful free enterprise economy in the OECD countries for the past five years. But it has seen a major re-distribution of wealth – from the working population to a super-rich elite. In 1987, the share of the national economy going to profits, dividends and rents was 31% of non-agricultural income. A decade later it had increased to 41% while the share going to wages, pensions and social security had fallen by the equivalent figure.

Second, there is pattern of commodification. Capitalism has a strong tendency to turn more and more aspects of our lives into a commodity. Everything from sports stars to domestic waste become items which are bought and sold in a market place. Traditionally, the public services, which operated on a philosophy that people had some rights to free provision, stood as a barrier to this process of commodification. However, the main agenda of the neo-liberal revolution which began in the eighties was precisely to break down this barrier. Under the new GATS proposals currently under discussion at the World Trade Organisation many areas of our public services will be 'de-regulated' and subject to competition from multi-national 'service providers'. The current government policy of promoting 'Public Private Partnerships' is one of the chief mechanisms for doing just that.

Third, a boom / slump cycle. In the heady days of the nineties, a number of US commentators claimed that there was a 'new paradigm of growth' which meant that the business cycle had been overcome because of the new technology offered by the computer industry. However the system operates through two contradictory tendencies.

There is, on one hand, a pressure to produce more and more goods in order to accumulate more profit and capital. But there is also a pressure on each individual company to reduce 'unit costs' – i.e. the level of wage costs which are used to buy these goods. The result is a periodic crisis of 'over-production'. Today we are witnessing a simultaneous slowdown in all the major industrial economies. The Celtic Tiger is particularly vulnerable to this global slowdown because a) it has followed an export orientated industrialisation programme and b) it is extremely dependent on US investment, having six times more US capital per manufacturing workers than the EU average.

These three tendencies mutually reinforce each other and lead to ever greater disparities of wealth.

The Celtic Tiger has been described as one of the most de-regulated economies in the world by the OECD. The Irish state, for example, is leading a 'race to the bottom' where it offers an astonishing tax rate of 12.5 percent to giant corporations. But the effects of all of this are seen in the run down of the public sector. The mass of the population subsidises the low taxes on profits by making do with poor health services, under-funded schools, under-subsidised public transport and virtually non-existent public pre-school education. The policies of de-regulation and tax cutting reinforces existing inequalities but do nothing to ward off the danger of a dramatic recession.

These powerful tendencies to inequality mean that the very notion of social partnership is a myth.

Social partnership – as expressed through the various national agreements – means that wages are controlled while every other item of the economy – prices, rents, profits – is de-regulated.

If you control one major source of income while others are free to rise, it follows there is a re-distribution of wealth - to holders of capital.

Social partnership implied a degree of sharing by all sectors of the economy yet there was little sharing of gains during the boom. By contrast, at the first sign of recession, employers who were ardent advocates of social partnership, let workers go rather than accept the slightest restraint in the form of reduced profits.

Social partnership functions therefore as a dominant ideology which demobilises and dis-empowers poorer socio-economic groups.

As Eagleton puts it “*dominant ideologies help to unify a social formation in ways convenient for its rulers.... it is not simply a matter of imposing ideas from above but of securing the complicity of the subordinated classes*”. This complicity is also secured by an active policy of co-opting a layer of union and community activists to structures which imply there are common, rather than conflicting, interests in our society.

How does this work in terms of the community sector? Firstly, social partnership is often sold on the basis that it reduces ‘social exclusion’ and many community organisation are encouraged to go along with partnership agreements lest funds for reducing social exclusion are cut. However actual, the record on poverty reduction is appalling. The poor have certainly found low paid jobs during the boom but Ireland still has the second highest level of relative poverty in the developed world according to the United Nations Human Development Report.

The structures of social partnership imply a conflict of interests between the community sector and organised labour. Thus demands for higher wages for teachers, nurses, shop workers or train drivers are defined as ‘sectional’ and cutting against the ‘national interest’ while wage restraint is supposed to be the trade-off for the government providing funds for anti-poverty strategies. The notion that there is a two thirds / one thirds society with a contented majority and an underclass represented by community organisation plays into this discourse.

Finally, there is pressure for partnership structures to provide voluntary self-help schemes which compensate for the reduction in state activity. Instead of the state providing jobs or funding well resourced crèches, ‘the community’ is encouraged to provide these themselves with much reduced capital.

None of this implies that community organisation should not take any grant from the EU or the Irish state. Nor does it suggest that representatives of community organisation do not have to make some show at ‘playing the game’ simply to get access to vital resources.

It is however suggesting that the philosophy of social partnership which has permeated community and union organisations needs to be discarded in favour of a strategy of resistance which focuses on mobilisation and direct action to achieve concrete gains.

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Equality in Education



Introduction

There are at least four core social contexts in which inequality may be generated in a given society: it may have its generative roots in the economic relations, in power relations, in socio-cultural relations or in affective relations. In the pursuit of a socially just society, and a socially just education system, there are four core equality issues therefore that need to be addressed: economic, political, socio-cultural and affective.

Applying the Equality Framework to Education

The different forms of inequality present very different challenges to educators. Economic inequalities in the ownership and control of wealth, and in wages and welfare, result in a situation whereby those who are poorer simply cannot avail of educational services on equal terms with those who are better off. At a basic political level, therefore, economic equality is about equalising incomes, howsoever they are derived; it is fundamentally, albeit not exclusively, a social-class related problem.

There are two major reasons why education services must be distributed equally. First because education is a social good, in and of itself, it is important that it is equally available to all. Second, because educational credentials are used to select and stratify within the paid labour market, achieving equality in the distribution of education is essential for equalising opportunities in the labour market.

The litany of failure in relation to eliminating social class inequality in education has reached almost ritualistic proportions. Instead of propelling governments into radical action, the response is to put in place new pilot programmes and initiatives.

What is baffling about this strategy is that it ignores major international studies demonstrating that such programmes cannot and will not work in isolation from deeper structural changes in income and wealth distribution in particular. Studies across thirteen countries over a forty year period have shown that there has only been a reduction in class inequality in educational opportunity where educational reforms were supported by significantly reducing class inequalities in income and living conditions.

Work within Ireland has also indicated the implausibility of promoting equality in education in any substantive sense without structural change. What this means is that there is no internal settlement to the problem of class inequality in education. Because education is deeply integrated and implicated, in both its process and outcomes, with the economic structures of a given society, to claim that one is promoting equality in education without addressing economic injustices is to engage in an act of educational and political confusion.

What policy makers too often forget is that inequality is a relational phenomenon. When the State targets a disadvantaged group, economically advantaged households generally use their superior resources to neutralise the effects of the public investment by increasing their private investment in their children, be it by investing in more selective schools, extra tuition, or by the increased resourcing of their children's schools, via voluntary contributions, donations, etc.

It is not only through its economic policies that the State advantages the already advantaged in education, it also promotes inequality as the investment that it makes in education for a given citizen is highly inequitable. The investment that the State makes in the education of a person who undertakes four years of higher education is 2.5 times what it invests in a person who leaves school at the end of two years secondary schooling.

Schools themselves are not neutral actors in the perpetuation of class inequality. Many schools position themselves to attract the most educationally attractive students through a host of mechanisms that are clearly class biased. Most obviously schools that charge fees (with some minor exceptions) exclude all those who cannot pay. Many schools also engage in indirect social class exclusion by their expectation that parents will pay a sizeable voluntary contribution.

A further inequality often arises with the grouping of students by so-called 'ability' in schools. Research has shown that middle class students are least likely to be in low streams or bands within banded/streamed schools, and they dominate the fee-paying schools where mixed 'ability' is the normal form of grouping in the junior cycle. They have a higher probability therefore, once within a particular school, of being in classes in which subjects are taken at higher (as opposed to ordinary or foundation) levels.

A further problem is the culture of schools themselves. Although there has been a long tradition of cultural deficit theory in the social sciences attributing the causes of class inequality in education to the so-called cultural deficits of working class families, the problem is one of difference rather than deficit.

In social class terms, as schooling currently operates, it is as much a force for the perpetuation of class inequality as much as it is a site of learning. It sets out a vision of equality of opportunity in neo-liberal terms that is formal rather than substantive, that is wishful rather than real.

Why Does Inequality Continue?

One of the major reasons why governments and policy makers continue to support initiatives that tinker at the edges of injustice without radically altering its pattern is undoubtedly because of the power and influence of middle class interests on educational policy in Irish society.

The perpetuation of inequality would not be so politically acceptable however, without a legitimating ideology, a set of ideas that continues to justify current practice and make it seem plausible. As I have observed at length elsewhere, the legitimating ideology of Irish education policy is that of neo-liberalism. The focus has been on equalising opportunities rather than equalising resources. Consequently, what has been achieved in education is a minimalist type of equality of access, but not equality of participation, and certainly not equality of outcome. At best, the goal has been to increase the proportionate representation of marginalised groups in the more privileged areas of education.

Recognition of Differences, Democratisation and Education of the Emotions

Socio-cultural inequalities manifest themselves in education as problems of non-recognition, mis-recognition and misrepresentation, all leading to lack of respect. All the practices in education whereby differences arising from ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability or other statuses are subordinated, ignored or denigrated are examples of socio-culturally generated inequalities.

This is a major challenge for educators in Ireland where there has been little debate or analysis about educating *for* diversity or educating *with* diversity. Differences have traditionally been managed by segregation.

Ireland still has one of the most segregated systems of Europe: 35% of primary students and 42% of second-level students are in single-sex schools; 99% of primary schools are denominationally owned and controlled, as are 60% of second-level schools; 47% of disabled students attend segregated or 'special' schools, most of which are designated as primary schools regardless of the students' age.

If we care to educate for diversity and with diversity, we cannot be selective about the identities we respect and recognise. Yet that is precisely what has happened in Ireland. A deep silence pervades education about differences in sexual orientation among both teachers and students. Yet, the failure to respect the sexual orientation of people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual, represents, in many respects, the classic case of non-recognition.

There is a growing recognition that inequality may also be experienced in school in power terms, by students and by teachers. Resolving inequalities arising from the misuse of power in schools involves democratising the pedagogical and organisational relations of schooling; it involves re-ordering relations in terms of co-operation rather than dominance and sub-ordination, in terms of service and collegiality rather than hierarchy and control.

Young people seem to be operating out of a different conception of authority to educators and teachers; in particular they reject the exercise of traditional authority, and the assumption that a teacher was to be obeyed because of the authority vested in her or his role. They seek a greater democratisation of schooling, both at the organisational and at the classroom levels.

There is a second reason to promote the democratisation of schooling relations and this has to do with education itself. If we are to educate students to engage in public life as democratic citizens, to become politically engaged as opposed to politically disenchanted and disinterested, it is essential that they learn how to be democratically engaged in the public domain. The first public forum where that opportunity arises for all members of society is in education.

The democratisation of education is not only a challenge to teachers, it is also a challenge to school managers and school owners. Schools and colleges themselves need to democratise their relations with staff, parents and their constituent communities, not only to preclude conflict, but also to understand differences and facilitate change.

Finally, equality in education demands that we do not simply define students as abstracted rational actors. Those who attend school are also emotional actors; they operate as affective beings to whom relations of dependency and interdependency are an integral part of their daily existence. Achieving equality in the affective domain demands that we take account of the affective dimension of human life, of people's need for trust and care, and of the need to learn about one's own emotional existence. There needs to be formal recognition of the importance of developing emotional, inter-personal and intra-personal intelligences. The emotional self needs to be taken out of the private domain and brought into the public domain to be educated. In addition, the public domain of schooling must be reconstituted to recognise the importance of relations of trust, care and solidarity in and of themselves.

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Kathleen Lynch

*This is a synopsis of a larger paper that formed the basis for
Kathleen's input at the conference*

The Church and inequality in Ireland



The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of Church involvement in relation to inequality in Ireland. I also want to identify aspects of its approach towards addressing inequality and to describe features of its approach at local, regional and national level and to explore issues relevant to community sector engagement with the Church and its personnel. I'd like to take this opportunity at the outset to state clearly what this paper is NOT - it will not attempt to accurately define the Church's role in welfare provision and social policy and explore this in relation to the State and the community and voluntary sector. Rather it will toss out a few observations and some facts about the Church's role which I hope will engage with your experience and your knowledge of its role so that we can develop some pointers for the community sector on how it should engage with the Church in its own mission to eliminate social exclusion, poverty and inequality.

Church's role in inequality in Ireland

Outside of the State, historically, the Catholic Church has probably played the most significant role in relation to inequality in Ireland. Its role has not always been straightforward - if you look at aspects of inequality such as gender, race, economic inequality, development and global inequality, homophobia and so on, the Church has sometimes adopted what may be perceived as almost contradictory roles – both internally, in relation to the expression of Church doctrine and dogma and its subsequent practice, and even between the various areas of inequality. When looking at the Church's role, it's useful to draw a distinction between its TEACHING influence and its PRACTICAL influence. The Church itself is not one uniform structure - at its simplest, it consists of the institutional Church operating from a parish/diocese system and controlled centrally from Rome, and it also consists of the numerous congregations of religious men and women who, as organisations, are self-organising though with traditionally close ties to the institutional Church. In the 1800s, the Catholic Church's survival and expansion during a period of rapid social and economic change depended considerably on its success in developing a powerful and far-reaching role as a social service provider.

In general, both in this country and elsewhere, Catholic schools, hospitals, orphanages and other such institutions largely preceded those provided by emerging welfare states. Its involvement in social service provision, together with a highly organised parish system, was the foundation of both developing and entrenching its role in what are the critical areas in relation to inequality - education, health, the law, social service provision and so on.

However, this brings us to one quite important feature of Church involvement in this arena. Religious congregations provided a significant source of energy, drive and personnel without which the Church could not have maintained its influence. By the mid-1960s, there were about 16,000 nuns and 14,000 male religious and clergy involved in the Catholic Church - a significant cohort by any standards. Now, it has been pointed out that the work of the Church in providing services in education, health and social services simply displaced that of the state and that the Church effectively colonised activities that the state should have provided. While there may indeed be some truth in this view, certainly up until recent decades, State investment in service provision in Ireland at the time was not adequate to providing the level of service that the Church and State combined provided.

And this brings us to looking at the outcome of all that activity, that investment of energy and resources. Undoubtedly, services were available for people that would otherwise have received sub-standard, little or no assistance. But what of its impact on Irish society? Has it become equal as a result? How has it affected the development of social policy and the then developing administration of these policies? Various analysts and commentators feel that the Church's impact on these areas was certainly limited and, given the scale of its involvement, certainly less than one would expect. It's fair to ask why this was the case. If it was involved in so many areas crucial to the equality of a society such as education and health, how come these areas are exactly those where those experiencing exclusion and income poverty experience such inequality nowadays? The reason is that for the Catholic Church, these areas were a means to an end - that end being the dissemination of the Catholic faith and its positions on family life, education, bodily integrity and health, and so on. The concern for redistribution took second place to that aim.

The energies of the people of the Catholic Church were diverted away from the hows and whys of addressing social need to issues of the propagation of the Catholic faith. However, the 1960s saw some change and this is particularly evident when one looks at the state of religious orders. Change in its teaching and its practice can be identified from this period.

Firstly the expansion in numbers of Catholic religious personnel came to an end and soon turned into a decline. This has meant that religious congregations and diocesan personnel now have dwindling and rapidly ageing members and have begun a process of disengagement from schools, hospitals and other services built up over the years. On the ground, this has meant that services and initiatives that were formerly wholly run and administered by the Church are now changing their organisational structures and their staff. Nowhere is this more evident than in schools where new management structures (trusteeships) have been set up involving non-religious - but retaining Church control over such things as 'ethos', management and so on.

Catholic social thought also underwent a profound period of development. Concepts of solidarity with people in poverty, of 'conscientisation' of the masses and of confronting secular authorities to achieve social justice became more prominent from the sixties, particularly in Latin America. In Ireland, we can see this change particularly in relation to issues such as homelessness, prostitution, asylum-seekers and refugees, Traveller issues and rural development, to name a few, and many individuals have contributed significantly to informing debate on social policy and administration in those areas. Religious congregations in particular have developed more systematic and organised approaches to addressing inequality, many setting up what's called 'Justice offices' and CORI - the umbrella body for religious congregations - has its own justice commission.

So, can the community sector look to the Church as a natural ally in the campaign to end social exclusion, poverty and inequality? Well, as with any search for suitable partners or bedfellows, compatibility can be assessed on a number of different levels and that old maxim 'never judge a book by its cover' does certainly appear to apply here. I've included a couple of thoughts on how to assess this that may be useful in assisting the community sector to develop strategies of engagement. And let's be clear - with 'the faith' being the fundamental *raison d'être* of the Church, its pronouncements and actions in relation to many areas of inequality including gender, lesbian and gay issues, and consequent implications in relation to service provision in relation to education and health, a 'carte blanche' approach from the sector towards the Church may not be appropriate.

So, with those thoughts in mind, what's your opinion of the role of the Church in relation to inequality in our society? How has it operated, in your experience? What can the sector learn from the Church's involvement? How should we move forward?

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Siobhan Airey

Supporting Community Work



Introduction

Community work is working towards change within society from an anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality agenda. Community work is a means of achieving social change and involves concentrating on the processes involved while working to achieve specific tasks.

There are key principles which underpin Community work:

- Participation
- Collective Action
- Empowerment/Capacity building
- Anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-discriminatory
- Involvement in decision making
- Starting where groups are at
- Solidarity
- Linking local to national

Current issues

Knowing the Principles

Community work has clearly stated principles. These range from collective action to participation. Meaningful community work is dependent on the application of these principles not on the selective use of certain principles.

There is a clear misapplication of the term or rather ideology of community work by certain community groups and state agencies. This is evident in the lack of community groups participation in social change initiatives. An example at statutory level is where a local agency carries out a series of meetings to “consult” with community groups and will then claim this as community participation, without the community groups being involved in the decision making process.

Engaging in Social Partnership

Social Partnerships – the structures established where community representatives engage with service providers plus elected officials in decision-making structures.

The issues facing community representatives are:

- Engaging effectively without losing our autonomy
- The lack of resources to ensure meaningful participation

Community Work Approaches

Both the community sector and the statutory sector require clarity on what exactly is Community Work. Quiet a lot of what is being done in the name of Community Work is actually community organising and community service delivery. This lack of clarity results in communities concentrating on maintaining their given situation as opposed to working towards change.

Funding

The nature in which funding is structured and delivered is in danger of controlling the practice of community work. Thus eliminating the ability of community workers to take a critical and independent stance. Resourcing community work is the key to recognising the importance of ensuring marginalised communities are empowered in the manner which enables them to participate in decision making structures. However the competition for funding and the conditions which are attached to funding are leading to a situation which is destroying autonomous collective action and decreasing our radical critical voice.

Community based representation

There are different expectations for the community sector in engaging with other sectors be it within social partnerships or within local committee structures. The right of Community representatives is often questioned particularly when social structures are being challenged.

Participation is being directed, controlled and mediated. Radicalism is decreasing, the 'Don't rock the boat' syndrome is increasing.

Solutions/Supports Required

After examining the current issues affecting Community Work I will sum up what actions for which supports are required:

- To be critical participants while maintaining autonomy
- To strengthen and build the community sector ensuring co-operation and solidarity at local level
- To engage in social partnership
- To maintain and rebuild social, political and economic analysis
- To be involved in policy developments/changes
- To work locally and engage nationally

Community Work Principles

- Developing and implementing clear policies within community organisation. Such policies need to be promoted particularly in the statutory organisations or services providers.
- Clear analysis
- Training and promotion of all community work principles

Engaging in social partnerships

- Develop a strong local Community sector
- Build solidarity amongst groups
- Local State agencies need to resource community representation

Community Work Approaches

- Know your desired outcomes. Ensure the means of working towards these processes will produce the necessary social change.

Funding

- The temporary nature of funding particularly from state agencies leads to a strong perception that community work is short term, putting community organisations under constant pressure to 'produce results' which are outside their control.
- There is a need to separate monitoring finances and supporting of community work.

Community-based Representation

- Collective approach is crucial to ensuring effective representation at various levels
- Community groups need to be resourced and supported to participate on various fora

Other

- The social, economic and political context is changing and an up to date analysis of this needs to be developed

Communities have the basic right to identify their own communities needs and support.

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Mary O'Donoghue

Relating to the State Nationally



In entering into a discussion of this nature it is useful to clarify some terms and the parameter of the discussion. For the purpose of this discussion, the state is defined as both the administrative (government departments, state agencies national and local) and the political apparatus. The community sector is defined as that part of civic society that is concerned with anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality interests, and the pursuit of structural and social change in the interests of the marginalised.

The context within which the community sector relates to the state has undergone significant changes in the past decade. Our system of governance has evolved to encompass a greater focus on participatory democracy. This has resulted in a complex system of social partnership at both national and local levels. The community sector was to the fore in calling for more participatory ways of formulating policy and in decision-making. One of the arguments put forward by the sector at that time was the need for anti-poverty interests to be involved at all stages of decision-making rather than being consulted on the outcomes of a process decided elsewhere. At a national level, the sector is engaged in a range of social partnership arenas ranging from policy making bodies and advisory bodies to monitoring structures. Likewise, at a local level, the sector is now represented on a plethora of structures, many of which came about through the reform of local government and the evolution of local social partnership.

Social partnership is but one - albeit significant - way that the community sector relates to the state. Funding relationships are also important and have an increasing influence on community work practice. Community sector organisations are now more likely to have substantial funding and service contracts with state agencies. This reality does have an impact on how we relate as individual organisations or as a sector with the state and influences the type of activity undertaken. This throws up many issues, one of them being the thorny issue of independence. There are growing concerns about the extent to which the state through the terms and conditions of various funding arrangements, is attempting to shape and control the nature and direction of community work activity.

The 'power to protest' has been and still is one of the core means for the community sector to work for social change. Mobilisation of those who are excluded, protest, campaigning and constructive opposition are all elements of a functioning and active democracy. While there may be no or little agreement on the nature of problems or indeed the solutions required in general, there is acknowledgement that a range of stakeholders in society have a right to exert pressure in their own interests. Unfortunately, we have seen a tendency in recent times to question this fundamental right and I suggest that the manner in which the state has structured funding programmes, established mechanisms for participation or set criteria for selection is a direct move to control, quench, mediate and undermine the ability of the community sector to relate to the state in a more assertive, autonomous and, most importantly, critical manner. One of the consequences from a move to de-politicise or contain protest is a high level of 'self censorship' which in reality is the most powerful means of containing or limiting the voice and potential strength of the marginalised.

How we view our relationship with the state can be the key determinant in securing positive outcomes or indeed maintaining integrity in a dynamic where we are often the weakest partner and appear to hold the least amount of power. Do we see our engagement with the state and other social partners as about a process of achieving consensus or is this engagement about presenting clear agendas that lead to an inevitable compromise? Too often the net result is agreement based on the lowest common denominator and as we know too well this means that majority, less contentious issues are more likely to be advanced and the more difficult, minority issues sidelined. This has serious implications for community work, given the fact that our concern is to work on those very areas and issues which frequently have least support.

The relationship between the state and community sector is often presented in a benevolent way, similarly the partnership process is projected as the cosy coexistence by relatively equal partners with some overlapping agendas. Notwithstanding the value of closer co-operation between different stakeholders, the model of partnership or the rhetoric surrounding the relationship between the state and community sector does not acknowledge the underlying inequalities, legitimacy or resource capabilities that govern the nature of all these relationships. Conflict is a far more accurate verb to describe the nature of the relationship. Conflict should not be seen as a negative term. This acknowledgement brings with it a clarity and sense of purpose. Immediately it becomes clear why an independent and critical voice is important for it is impossible to be strident in pursuing social inclusion objectives without independence and autonomy to act.

So in this short input the main message I have tried to communicate is the need to be clear about the nature and purpose of developing our relationships with the state. Central to this is the recognition of the reality that none of these relationships are neutral or without stated or frequently unstated conditions. The community sector is challenged to position itself so that it can engage in a way that carries maximum weight, strength and negotiating muscle power. This will not happen without a consciousness and a realisation that it is in the vested interest of those who hold power to maintain current dynamics. It requires us also to be aware of what has been termed the 'acceptable level of dissent', where illusions of independence, self-determination and the right to criticise are facilitated within a set of parameters set out by the state.

Finally, national states are becoming more and more linked into and accountable to European and World Institutions. We need to see ourselves relating to and influencing those institutions who hold such power and control over our own national state.

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Siobhan O'Donoghue

Responding to the Challenges Locally



In responding to the challenges facing the community sector at a local level it is important to first be clear on some of the terms and concepts that inform who we are and what we are about. The first of these is the use of the term community work.

Community Work

Community work focuses on bringing about social change within a set of working principles, namely that the process is collective, participative, social justice and equality focused, and employs a methodology which is empowering and liberating to individual participants and the community.

Community Sector

The individuals and groups organisationally and ethically linked within community work comprise the community sector. It operates at a range of levels and promotes and advances its work mainly through the activities of community workers and activists both paid and unpaid. The community sector is also organised around some common values i.e. participation by those experiencing poverty and exclusion. The sector is generally organised around interest groups or issues that relate to altering the balance of power between those who don't have it and those who maintain power inequalities. A growing challenge is the need to think beyond our own agendas and organisations and ask ourselves how do we co-operate with other organisations with similar aims in order to build solidarity and shared agendas. The distinction between the community and voluntary sector is important. Often the two are lumped together. Briefly, voluntary organisations are larger, service orientated with big budgets, are often religious based and generally concerned with the improvement of individuals circumstances.

While the work of voluntary organisations is very valuable there is a distinction with community sector organisations who have as their primary concern the alleviation of poverty and disadvantage and are focused on collective outcomes as opposed to individual gain, even if this is a natural by-product of the work.

Our purpose

Community work and the community sector are associated with transformation and change, not maintenance of a system that creates and reproduces poverty. Our work is not about accepting small changes or tokens here and there. While there are a set of realities that inform our day-to-day work, it is important to hold onto that ideology and, where possible, unify organisations with a similar ethos under a common agenda of social change, justice, equality, etc. Developing a shared vision and ideology facilitates us to work together in pursuit of a shared agenda. In recent years, we have seen the growth of community sector organising mechanisms around the shared theme of anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality interests. We have also seen the growth of generalised type structures such as community fora. We know from experience that within these generalised type structures, the social inclusion agenda is becoming ghettoised or diluted within a broad based agenda. Our purpose is to ensure that the social inclusion agenda is not lost but prioritised within the structures we are required to engage with, and, most importantly, where possible create our own independent structures that are exclusively focused on anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality interests.

Why is the role of the community sector changing?

There has been a huge increase in levels of wealth. People tend to forget that in the not so distant past we had massive levels of unemployment and poverty. The developments that have taken place raise key questions about who we are and what we prioritise. Traditional notions about poverty, unemployment and exclusion are not really valid anymore. There is a direct link between poverty and inequality and that requires us to work more specifically with those groups who are excluded because of discrimination and exclusion based on their status in society.

There has been a failure by government to adequately address poverty, social exclusion and inequality. While there have been real improvements in relation to unemployment and poverty, it is also true that the progress that is required has not happened. We have a widening gap between rich and poor and the reality for many is that their quality of life has not improved at all. We have a duty to ensure that these issues are visible and heard.

There is a growing sense of individualisation and a climate where individual success is promoted coupled with a breakdown of community where the sense of vision and values get diluted. Notions of community and solidarity are important to building collective action and transformation.

Growing wealth has led to complacency amongst state agencies. The anti-poverty, anti-exclusion message has been put to one side – there is resistance to naming these as issues. Because the dominant analysis within the state is that the individual has to take responsibility for his/her own actions, it is now the case that there is little scope or willingness to deal with the structural nature of exclusion. There is an assumption that the conditions exist for all to ‘pull themselves up’. Ireland sees itself as a success story and admitting that there are deep structural problems would undermine its glory.

There has been a reassessment in the nature of how poverty gets dealt with by the state. Social partnership has brought the community and voluntary sector to the process. The community and voluntary sector are now being asked to be problem solvers, sometimes having no power or being labelled as ‘do-gooders’. There is now a lot more analysis within the community sector about what participation in partnership means. The biggest lesson is the realisation that we need a strong agenda that is well grounded in the experiences of the excluded and is negotiated in a way that ensures a focus on outcomes as opposed to simply getting issues named.

The political system in particular has failed people who are excluded. For example, a 50% turnout in the 1999 local government elections highlights just how distanced from the democratic process many are. This highlights the difference between elected representation and participative democracy. This increase in the promotion of participative democracy is reflected in government documents but does not trickle down to local level. We, as the community and voluntary sector, need to be the ones to drive it.

With the building of social partnership we have more capacity to impact on planning and decision-making - albeit there is still a serious power imbalance. We are now negotiating outcomes, which is a new thing. The culture of local state agencies has not adapted to this reality and personnel find it hard to take us seriously. At a local level we can set clear agendas and deliver them but this involves huge co-operation and effort amongst ourselves. Putting the effort into building co-operation must be seen as a core element of our work in advancing an anti-poverty agenda.

A whole range of new structures and partnership arrangements have emerged in recent years such as the CDBs and SPCs, and Community Fora. All of these are creating new demands and pull on resources. While embracing the opportunities that are presented we need also to be sceptical and maintain our own independence and autonomy within these processes.

A critical analysis is central to successful outcomes in any partnership process and in organising to engage, it is essential that we do not recreate oppressive structures.

We need to identify how we want to engage. We need to ask ourselves the following questions and be clear on the answers.

- Are we involved in the process as individual organisations or activists?
- Are we activists or not?
- Do we get sucked in to the process or maintain autonomy and critical analysis?
- Are we informed enough?
we need to be more informed (often more than the state).

There is an assumption that when we are involved in partnership that we are all in agreement, this is not necessarily the case. We need to avoid consensus traps and maintain our right to advance our issues in other ways that can also affect change.

In conclusion, there have been a range of changes over the past decade that present many challenges for the community sector at a local level. The understanding and nature of poverty, the explosion in developments at a local level, the dilution of concepts such as community work are but some of the significant ones. We are now challenged to give attention to the way we organise in order to hold a focus on poverty, social exclusion and inequality and to ensure that the values by which we operate are maintained. It is no longer a simple matter of deciding what is needed to change. Building solidarity and collective action across a range of interests is the way forward.

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Margaret O’Riada
Action for Equality Galway

*Developing Diverse Agendas for a * Diverse Society*

Context

Cultural diversity in Ireland is not a new phenomena. On the one hand, there is an ongoing exchange with people in Europe who come to Ireland to settle and work. But there have also been communities – Travellers, Black Irish – who have lived in Ireland for centuries. Yet, the term ‘cultural diversity’ is increasingly used to describe current changes as if Irish society was homogeneous before the arrival of asylum seekers. This, obviously, is not the case. However, racism is on the increase and becoming more visible – though we need to remind ourselves that racism existed before the arrival of asylum seekers. White settled people just didn’t see it as an issue.

Racism is one root cause of social exclusion and marginalisation. If community work is about changing society, about challenging power structures, and about justice, then community workers need to challenge racism. They need to understand its history and structure.

We also need to work with the people experiencing racism in our society: asylum seekers & refugees, Travellers, Black Irish, migrant workers.

My current work is with the Galway Refugee Support Group and I will focus on the issue of racism as experienced by asylum seekers & refugees in Galway.

The Galway situation

There are currently over 500 asylum seekers living in Galway the majority of whom live in direct provision, i.e. hostel accommodation. There are about 38 different nationalities.

Issues arising for asylum seekers:

- Lack of choice in their lives – about where they live, about what they eat, about when they eat and all the basic decisions we make about our daily lives.
- Lack of money – income is totally inadequate and further marginalises them.

- Language barriers – major language difficulties being experienced and inadequate provision of English language classes to enable people to learn/improve their English.
- Lack of information about their rights and entitlements and also about Irish society and how it works.
- Lack of privacy in the hostels.
- Boredom and isolation leading to health problems.
- No contact with Irish people.
- No allowances made for their own culture/religion/traditions within the Direct Provision system.
- Racism and discrimination.
- Many have left situations where they and their families experienced human rights abuses and traumas.
- Lack of understanding by statutory bodies about the cultures/countries and traditions where they come from. This was particularly keenly felt by women who had to have significant contact with e.g. Health Boards, GPs and hospitals.
- No special educational provision or right of access to education.

In order for community workers / community development projects to begin to engage with asylum seekers the following points need to be considered:

- Challenging racism within our own and other organisations.
- Acknowledging the powerlessness and isolation of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Recognising and respecting people's experience of discrimination and helping them to develop an analysis of same
- Building the self confidence and capacity of asylum seekers and refugees to challenge and change practices
- Ensuring that the voices of asylum seekers and refugees and other ethnic minorities are heard.
- Influencing and changing policy through the development of their own networks and working in solidarity with others.
- Building social solidarity and respect for difference and diversity.
- Developing opportunities for asylum seekers/refugees to get together with Irish communities.
- Promoting an awareness and respect for the rights of minorities.
- Including asylum seekers and refugees in community development at local level.

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Key Outcomes from the Workshops



1. Being clear about the vision and ideology informing community work

Community work is about radical social change. Social change can and does mean different things. For example Ireland has undergone significant social change in recent decades. However while positive changes have occurred particularly in relation to employment, little progress has been made for many living in poverty and for people experiencing discrimination or inequality. Community work is challenged to re-establish a vision for society that is centred on radical structural change in the interests of the most marginalised and disadvantaged in society.

This vision must encompass an economic and political as well as social and cultural dimension. Social progress is not possible without a model of economic development that is both environmentally, social and culturally sustainable. To date we have tended to focus on the distributive aspects of the economy without giving much attention to the manner in which wealth is generated. Engagement with the political system is a core element of any strategy to re-vitalise a radical vision for society. Despite the political vacuum in left wing political ideology that has opened up in recent years there is evidence that there are possibilities for alliance building and connections. There has also been a long tradition of political lobbying within community work. This has declined in more recent years, most likely as a direct result of the dominance of the partnership model. Rebuilding this tradition will require concerted effort and leadership.

2. The nature and role of community work

Given the proliferation of activity under the guise of community development and community work it is vital that the understanding of the nature and role of community work is articulated clearly.

Community work is exclusively about tackling poverty, social exclusion and inequality. It is concerned with the root causes of these issues and seeks to alter the structures of society that create and maintain such inequalities. Community work operates from a set of principles including participation, empowerment and collective action, equality and self-determination. It is centrally concerned with the question of power – who holds it, how it is used and how to access it.

Much concern is being expressed regarding attempts to dilute the understanding of community work and community development. This dilution is seen to manifest itself in moves to direct community development organisations towards service provision, maintaining a focus on individual need versus collective action and a push away from an analysis that recognises the root causes of poverty, exclusion and inequality.

Community work should act as an independent critical voice of the existing status quo and should seek to generate debate, dialogue and awareness of the causes of oppression and inequality.

3. Building an independent community sector

An autonomous community sector is vital in any effort to address structural and power inequalities. Maintaining a focus on social inclusion, equality and anti-poverty is central to this struggle. The community sector needs to organise around these interests and avoid the danger of compartmentalisation and segregation as this will only serve to weaken our critical voice. In organising around anti-poverty, equality and social inclusion interests a vision and agenda for action needs to be developed. This agenda should be based on a structural analysis of the inequalities we are attempting to tackle. In attempting to bring about change a vision is essential. This vision needs to be articulated in a way that is clear and promotes maximum ownership and commitment.

A growing concern is the row back on the right of local communities to organise and be represented in a structured manner. Despite the growth of the community sector and the emergence of a range of structures locally and nationally there has been a shift towards the more traditional modes of tokenism and consultation. Representation, participation and mandates are being questioned and outdated notions of the role of volunteering promoted. Available funding is directing community sector organisations towards service provision and information provision. While these activities are fine in their own right we need to be careful to ensure that the focus is not shifted away from the structural nature of poverty and inequality and towards a belief that individuals are the site of both the problem and the solution. In this context it is becoming increasingly difficult for organisations to access resources that promote critical analysis, policy engagement and independent collective activity.

While the involvement of the community sector in policy development and partnership arrangements has significantly grown in recent years a feature of this process is the growth in structures that mediate the participation of the sector in social partnership arenas. At a national level the Community and Voluntary Pillar act as gatekeepers to national social partnership. The Community Platform, which provides a mechanism for anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality interests to organise collectively is kept at arms length by the existence of the Pillar. Likewise at a local level the emergence of the county fora have in effect controlled access and participation in local social partnership arrangements. The right to organise independently and not have participation mediated is a core principle of the sector. Given the manner in which many of these structures are established it is increasingly difficult for anti-poverty and equality interests to participate.

In response to the concerns of control and autonomy, independent structures and groupings have formed or are in the process of forming in many parts of the country. These offer a valuable mechanism for anti-poverty and equality interests to collectivise and generate solidarity, common agendas and maximise energy and efforts in the pursuit of shared interests. It is also clear that where these independent structures exist, collective anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality interests are more visible both inside and outside the arenas of social partnership.

4. Governance, participatory democracy and social partnership

Social partnership has provided significant opportunities for the community sector to participate in decision and policy making. Social partnership as viewed within the context of governance can bring about an enhanced

participatory democracy. There are concerns however that while there are many positive aspects of this process the costs and limitations need serious consideration. One concern is that social partnership only facilitates discussion and progress on less contentious issues. The consequence is that issues that reflect deep divisions or reactions get little attention and as a result are often dropped for the safer 'middle ground'. Community work is therefore challenged to retain a focus on the concerns of the most marginalised e.g. racism, substance misuse. We are in danger of formulating our agendas to suit the limitations of the very structures we are trying to influence. The key concern for community work is to ensure that fundamental power relationships are rebalanced in the interest of the excluded.

Participation fatigue is a growing issue for many groups. Community groups are stretched beyond capacity to engage with social partnership structures. Frequently there is not enough attention given to developing the agenda that is being taken into these arenas, or to critiquing or assessing the productiveness of the process. In particular it was felt that social partnership could serve as a distraction from organising or developing alternative analysis, action or models of development. The question of 'self censorship' was raised as a concern for community work and the community sector. Because there is so much emphasis on participation there is evidence to suggest that the sector limits its voice and protest in the interest of consensus building. Given that partnership is not a level playing pitch and the relative unequal power base of the community sector this means an inevitable compromise or row back on anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality interests.

The ability of the sector to be 'in and against the state' was discussed in some detail. How possible is it to work for structural change while at the same time work under the shadow of those very same structures. In reality it was generally felt that we have little choice but to engage with the state. The key however is the manner in which we do this, the agenda we build and negotiate and the strategies we adopt in advancing our agenda inside social partnership and outside. A clearly defined autonomous community sector was identified as being fundamental to any process of successful engagement with the state. There is enough evidence to highlight the efforts of the state to control, direct and mediate participation in partnership structures. The analysis underpinning the work of the sector is also crucial. How the problem is defined will determine the solutions sought.

5. Resourcing community work activity

The funding environment has changed significantly in recent years. The increase in funding has in many ways been very beneficial, however there is growing concern on the

increasing control being exerted by funders on community organisations. In particular the role of the Department of Social Family and Community Affairs (DSFCA) was seen as problematic in the context of the Community Development Support Programme (CDSP). It was generally felt that the CDSP has provided valuable resources for community work activity. Significant concerns were expressed however about the balance between a community work led agenda and a DSFCA agenda. Concerns about being funding led have emerged as a challenge facing community work organisations. It was felt that the DSFCA are attempting to define and direct community development and in essence limit its critical and radical agenda. There was also concern about the nature and provision of supports for community work activity. The underpinning principles of autonomy, accountability, self-determination and equality were seen as important principles in establishing support mechanisms. The inherent contradiction of amalgamating a support and monitoring function within the CDSP was identified as one ongoing difficulty. The ability to identify and choose appropriate supports was also raised as a necessity for the healthy development of the programme. There is also a concern to build a collective identity within community work – locally and nationally. Given the structures of the CDSP at present this collective identity is being blocked as organisations are encouraged to identify with a Department led programme rather than as part of an independent community sector. Challenging the status quo is difficult at the best of times but nearly impossible when the identity of an organisation is tied up with a state led process.

The funding scenario has also become overly technical and cumbersome. While the move towards more transparent and organised accounting mechanisms is welcome it is felt that the level of administration attached to funding arrangements is blocking organisations from carrying out core activities. There is also a sense that the criteria attached to funding proposals is becoming too restrictive and controlling. Organisations are relating their activities to funding programmes rather than organisations core aims and objectives. Funding is available for the type of activities increasingly seen as priorities for the state. The result is that community work organisations are being drawn into large scale funding contracts mainly geared towards the delivery of services, which is altering the dynamic between independent community development organisations and state agencies. There appears to be less money available for engaging with policy development, advocacy work and campaigning work which is essential to any process of transformation and politicisation.