

The Purpose of the Research (see Introduction)

The purpose of the research was to develop indicators for future Community Development (CD) Programmes through the process of ‘telling the story’ of the Community Infrastructure (CI) Measures in Northern Ireland.

Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) was commissioned by the Voluntary Activity Unit (VAU) on behalf of the Physical Social Environment Programme (PSEP) Working Committee, to both carry out the initial pilot research in 1998 and the second more inclusive phase of work in 1999. The process entailed drawing on research literature, the Measure objectives and project selection criteria and the experiences of projects funded under the 1994-99 CI Measures. A further aspect of the research has been to provide guidance for specific indicators for specific projects in the future.

Reflecting community development principles, CENI ensured that the process of gathering stories and developing indicators was as inclusive as possible, by providing support, encouragement and facilitation to those projects participating in the exercise.

Community Infrastructure and Community Development in Northern Ireland

- **Achievements of the CI Measures** (see Part 1; Sections 2-9)

Overall, the CI funding has laid the foundations to develop an effective community infrastructure to support the community and voluntary sector and community development activity in Northern Ireland and created over 100 posts in community development related work.

Initiatives supported under the CI Measures take many forms and operate at different levels, from a regional basis, covering the whole of Northern Ireland, to sub regional, district council, town and neighbourhood levels. Most of the projects are engaged in working with and supporting other smaller community groups. A further specific area of work has been targeting areas of weak CI and limited community development.

The CI funding has enabled projects to innovate, meet their own objectives and those of the Measures around the following themes:

Group Support and Networking, Partnership Work and Policy Development
Community Capacity Building - Physical and Human Resources
Promoting Social Inclusion – Empowerment - Outreach – Participation
Economic and Social Development and Regeneration - Leverage of resources

- **Key Challenges and Learning** (see Stories & Section 9)

The CI project stories illustrate the challenges of community development and the considerable learning which has taken place. They have lessons for other similar projects and show many innovative models of practice to be replicated elsewhere. The research demonstrates the factors necessary for effective community development work, such as projects having clearly stated values and objectives and the commitment to work through the processes of project launch and implementation.

Community development work takes time, commitment and perseverance. A three-year funding cycle poses problems for projects, because a longer overall time is needed to set up inclusive structures and address the complex community needs of disadvantaged and socially excluded groups. Project resources are diverted away from development work toward fund-raising activities and uncertainty over funding can affect project stability.

- **Sustainability and Funding** (see Part 2; Section 10)

For future sustainability, CI initiatives have secured additional funding for continuing and developing their work and the regeneration of their communities. These funds come from a wide range of sources such as USA, EU funds, Northern Ireland Government departments, other statutory agencies, district councils and charitable trusts.

However, this favourable funding situation is likely to change and there is a risk that the momentum gained in setting up a community infrastructure, may be lost. Given this, it is important that any statutory funding inputs should be of a strategic nature and aim to provide support and stability to the community infrastructure now in place.

The sustainability of the CD/CI work can also mean that the innovative work or models of practice of specific projects is carried on in other forms and in other agencies.

- **Needs, Gaps in Provision and Future Programme Objectives** (see Part 2; Section 10)

Looking to the next stage of development of CI/CD and building on the achievements to date, a wide range of CI needs were identified and future Programme objectives proposed. These include: further research; strategy development; network development; capacity building (training and developing human and physical resources); developing the voluntary/community sector; promoting social inclusion and active citizenship; providing independent advice and information; providing physical infrastructure and community resources. There is also a need for more collaborative working and a rationalising of local community development efforts.

An important gap is a lack of community development in areas of weak community infrastructure. The Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT) Demonstration Programme has begun to tackle work in this area. It identifies the need for estates based work, a district towns initiative, the re-focusing of existing strategies, targeting support for areas of weak CI and cross-community peace building initiatives.

Developing Indicators For Future Community Development Programmes

(see Part 2; Section 11)

The research on the CI Measures has enabled a range of indicators to be drawn up to be used in the monitoring and evaluation of CD/CI projects and future Programmes. The mainly qualitative indicators are applicable to projects operating at different levels of CI and are linked to the different stages of project and Programme development, using the framework of inputs, process, outputs and outcomes. The full details of proposed indicators are presented in Section 11 and include:

- CI Project Indicators: to assist self-monitoring, self-evaluation and external evaluation of projects.
- Indicators for projects/communities of weak CI: to assist the identification of areas of weak CI, self-monitoring and evaluation.
- Indicators for future CD/CI Programmes: to assist Programme selection of projects and the evaluation of the whole Programme at the end of the funding period.

Programme administrators and projects applying for funding need to explore and agree the link between project aims and work and the overall aims of the programme. These links should be reflected in subsequent monitoring and evaluation indicators. There should also be agreement on how this information on the project should be used.

It is hoped that the indicators and research will contribute to the process of developing cross-cutting community development programmes in the future. Due to uncertainty surrounding the exact nature of such programmes, it has not been possible to link the indicators to specific policy or strategy objectives or outcomes. It is expected that the objectives and indicators will relate to CD/CI developments, changes in the voluntary and community sector and Northern Ireland society as a whole.

Recommendations

The following recommendations of the report are addressed to the VAU, which has specific responsibility for the formulation and development of community development policy in Northern Ireland.

The Unit is currently reviewing District Council Community Services (VAU, 1999) and the Voluntary/Community Sector Strategy (Department of Health and Social Services, 1993) with a view to developing the Compact between the Government and the voluntary/community sector (1999). However, the recommendations also apply to a wider range of funders of community development related activity.

- 1. The report recommends that the VAU include a theme of ‘Community Development’ within its Strategy Review and within that a strategic focus on ‘Community Infrastructure Support and Development’. The ‘CI Support and Development’ strategy should be based on community development principles and Promoting Social Inclusion and Targeting Social Need values. It should also build on the objectives and achievements under the first CI Measures.**
- 2. It is recommended that this central government CD/CI strategy should be complemented by local area strategies, organised around local government/ district council areas.**
- 3. The report also recommends that training and support should be provided for those involved in the formulation and implementation of CD/CI Strategies and in community development work on the ground.**
- 4. The report recommends that the indicators proposed by this research should be used in the planning and implementation of future CD programmes and projects.**

Final Comment

CENI believes the research will make a valuable contribution in that it demonstrates the impact of the CI Measures and their contribution to community development in Northern Ireland. The report will assist the VAU in the review of the Strategy for the support of the Voluntary Sector and for Community Development in Northern Ireland. We hope it will also inform proposals being developed for the new EU Structural Funds Plan (Department of Finance and Personnel, 2000-2006).

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SUMMARY REPORT

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Developing Indicators For
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