

Developing Disadvantaged Areas through Area-Based Initiatives

Reflections on over a Decade of Local Development Strategies



Prepared by
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Foreword

Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts have made a significant contribution to promoting inclusion, equality and addressing poverty over the past decade. The first 12 Partnerships were established in Ireland in 1991 as area-based responses to long-term unemployment under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress. Following their success, Government, in 1995 expanded the initiative and there are currently 75 groups implementing the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme under the two Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan. Achievements have been acknowledged at national and international level and highlighted through publications, research, evaluations and contributions to shaping and changing public policy. Direct benefits for individuals and communities have resulted and the practice of partnership has advanced joined up solutions to the multidimensional and persistent features of exclusionary processes. The approach has also contributed to the evolution and strengthening of participative modes of governance in Ireland.

ADM commissioned this study with the purpose of reflecting on the local development learning and experience in the context of the mid-term review of the NDP and as an aid to strategic planning into the next phase. The backdrop is one of altering policy and institutional frameworks. In addition, the evolving profiles of need in urban and rural areas have impacted on the manner of delivery and the nature of responses developed. Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts welcomed this opportunity to review their strategic position and work. Specifically the study aimed to:

- > Identify the key results of area based integrated social and economic development in addressing social exclusion
- > Assess the influence of Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts on the policy and institutional landscape
- > Bring maximum clarity to the particular role and focus of local development groups in future social inclusion programmes and strategies

Trutz Haase and Kieran Mc Keown re-affirm the unique contribution and achievements of Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts. This includes the ability to reach and target those who are most marginalized, the ability to assess, interpret and respond to individual and local needs, the experience gained of developing and delivering innovative responses, proven track records in establishing collaborative linkage across a variety of service providers with the back up of effective administrative systems and structures.

The study provides very useful reflections in a number of areas. It argues that space is an important aspect of the structuring of social processes. The specific local development contribution is to address the cumulative effects of the clustering of negative processes in poorer neighbourhoods. The unique contribution to the institutional landscape is understood in these terms. The role in addressing disadvantage is to develop innovative solutions to the issues and in order to be effective in this, accountability and semi-independent positioning is necessary. This requires systematic monitoring and evaluation and strenuous measurement of impact. Among the challenges posed are evaluation frameworks at local, ADM, regional and national levels, the balance of initiatives between service delivery and innovation and the ability of policy formation mechanisms to learn from the local development experience.

The principles outlined by the authors propose a clarification of the unique remit and contribution of Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts within the wider local development arena. This thought provoking study will stimulate review and discussion. It is anticipated that in the process, it will contribute to the shared aim among all stakeholders, of optimising the potential and value of local development strategies in promoting social and economic inclusion and combating inequality and relative poverty.

ADM would like to thank the many contributors to this study and in particular the Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts who participated generously and openly. A particular note of appreciation is due to Trutz Haase and Kieran Mc Keown whose analysis provides a challenging and useful critique and set of views that will assist strategic planning under the second phase of the NDP.

As managers of the Programme on behalf of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, ADM would like to offer sincere thanks to the Minister and his Department for their ongoing support and commitment to this valuable work.

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Trutz Haase & Kieran McKeown (*April 2003*)

Important Notice

Throughout the report, the term 'area-based initiatives' is used to refer to all types of initiatives with a predominantly spatial local development remit. The terms 'Partnerships', 'area-based Partnerships' or 'Partnerships and Community Groups' are used synonymous and, as indicated by the use of the capital letter 'P', all refer to the 38 Partnership Companies and 33 Community Groups currently supported under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP). The term does not include the Territorial Employment Pacts supported under the LDSIP, as these are discussed in a separate section. The term 'partnership' with small 'p' is used either in the context of the national partnership process or when referring to the concept of partnership in general.

Executive Summary

Since 1992, ADM has been responsible for the management of area-based integrated social and economic development programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU. Following the successful implementation of the Operational Programme for Urban and Rural Development (OPLURD) under the 1994-1999 National Development Plan, ADM is currently responsible for the operational management of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) as well as a number of other Government initiatives with a local development dimension.

The purpose of this study is threefold: firstly, it aims to identify the achievements of area-based local development initiatives in promoting social inclusion and sustainable communities. Secondly, the study assesses the influence of local development Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts on the institutional and policy landscape. The third and final goal is to outline the role and focus of local area-based initiatives in future social inclusion programmes.

On the basis of a detailed analysis of local development in Ireland, the report reaches the conclusion that there is an urgent need to clarify the role of area-based Partnerships, Community Groups and Territorial Employment Pacts and their contribution to tackling the effects of multiple deprivation in Ireland's most disadvantaged urban and rural communities. The failure of successive local development programmes to clearly spell out the rationale of area-based initiatives has left these programmes prone to an ad hoc interpretation by Partnerships, ADM and Government departments. The report identifies three key issues that must be understood in this context.

Firstly, and contrary to common belief, the underlying issue is not whether area-based social inclusion initiatives represent the most appropriate way of reaching low-income households with high levels of social need. Most poor families do not live in areas that are immediately identifiable as 'poor', and it is therefore appropriate that the majority of anti-poverty measures should be aimed at individuals, families and households, and should be based on the income tax code, social welfare payments and entitlements to free state services. The budgets of area-based Partnerships and other local development initiatives are thus, justifiably, comparatively small to the billions of Euro spent on the main re-distributive elements of the combined tax and social welfare regimes.

Instead, the *raison d'être* of area-based initiatives is that space is an important aspect of the structuring of social processes. Many people are willing to pay a premium in order to reside in affluent neighbourhoods and to pay private school fees in order to provide their children with a superior education and a head start in their careers. The chief purpose of area-based initiatives in general, and the local development Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts supported under the LDSIP in particular, is therefore to counter the effects of the additional or cumulative effects arising out of the clustering of poor households.

Examples of these include the thinning-out of certain age cohorts in remote rural locations due to emigration, school-level and neighbourhood effects on educational achievements, the lack of jobs and services in disadvantaged urban and rural locations, drug and crime-related problems in areas of high unemployment and many more. All such phenomena have an effect on those who live in disadvantaged areas, increasing the level of social exclusion that they experience in their daily lives. The key aspect of these phenomena is therefore their spatial articulation; they result from the composition of households residing in an area, but are not necessarily amenable to change through policies aimed at poor individuals and families alone.

The second issue relates to the need for the State to find new and innovative solutions to the problems experienced in areas and communities which experience multiple and cumulative deprivation. Area-based Partnerships were initially set up in 1991 in response to the failure of centrally-administered welfare, training and job-creation programmes to offer an effective solution to the problems of unemployment and long-term unemployment in certain urban and rural communities. Over successive local development programmes, the remit of the area-based Partnerships has gradually been broadened, to the extent that it now covers a wide range of disadvantaged target groups.

Through their innovative work, area-based Partnerships offer a rich 'laboratory' from which the state administration can learn how to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of its own

activities. Charles Sabel, in his 1996 OECD evaluation of the Irish Partnership experience, refers to this process as 'democratic experimentalism'. Unfortunately, this important concept is frequently misunderstood, particularly by key Government departments and state agencies.

To make the project of 'democratic experimentalism' work, a much more scientific approach to monitoring and evaluation is needed. Currently, the monitoring environment is mainly occupied with the numerical assessment of throughputs and immediate results, but little is known about the actual impact of the area-based Partnerships and even less about the comparative value of different approaches to tackling poverty and deprivation. A fundamental rethink of the whole monitoring framework is needed.

The third issue relates to the gradual changes that have occurred within the national partnership process itself over the past fifteen years. Over the course of the five programmes that have been agreed since 1987, the emphasis in the national partnership negotiations has shifted from macroeconomic matters to structural and supply-side policies, and the range of supply-side issues under discussion has been widened to address issues that are widely considered as constraints on economic growth, such as childcare and life-long learning. This change in the content of the national partnership agreements has involved a parallel change in method. While macroeconomic strategy can be discussed in the context of national negotiations, complex policies that cut across different areas of society, relating to issues such as social exclusion, training, business development and childcare cannot be devised effectively within the confines of high-level negotiations. Consequently, in order to address the growing number of supply-side issues, a wide array of working groups, 'frameworks' and 'forums' have evolved, involving representatives of the various social partners. In a few areas of policy, such as long-term unemployment, rural and urban re-generation and business development, new institutional arrangements have been created so as to involve actors on the ground.

However, despite the opportunities generated by the unprecedented boom of the 1990s, most participants in the national partnership process feel that the success rate of the partnership approach in relation to structural and supply-side issues has been lower than in relation to macro issues. It seems that while we know how to do high-level bargaining, we are unsure about how to tackle multi-level problem-solving, and this is further exacerbated at local level. Indeed, in most areas, the shift to multi-level and local problem-solving has been limited, since the working groups are composed almost exclusively of national representatives of the social partners. It is therefore likely that at least some of the uncertainty currently evident amongst the social partners arises from the uneven development of the national social partnership system.

Once these three underlying issues have been understood correctly, the uncertainties that have arisen in relation to the future role of area-based Partnerships, partly as a result of the proliferation of local development structures, can be resolved more easily:

- * Firstly, local area-based Partnerships have a fundamental and unique contribution to make to the local development process.
- * Secondly, far from it being possible to 'absorb' them into the state administration, it is essential that Partnerships maintain a semi-independent status. 'Semi-independence' thereby refers to the freedom to develop innovative solutions to the problems of multiple and cumulative disadvantage at local level, whilst simultaneously being accountable through ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- * Thirdly, in order to achieve this, Partnerships will have to address some serious shortcomings:
 - They must resist the temptation to become predominantly mainstream providers of social inclusion programmes which do not contain significant innovations.
 - a fundamental rethinking of the evaluation process is necessary in order to determine the actual impact of innovative measures in a comparative research framework across all Partnership companies.
- * Fourthly, and finally, area-based Partnerships have a natural role to play as 'social inclusion watchdog' within the County Development Boards. Their role should be institutionalised and representatives of the area-based Partnerships and Community Groups have a key role to play with regards to the Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Groups.

Evaluating the Local Development Measure

1 Background

Since 1992, ADM has been responsible for the management of area-based integrated social and economic development programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU. Following the successful implementation of the Operational Programme for Urban and Rural Development (OPLURD) under the 1994-1999 National Development Plan, ADM is currently responsible for the operational management of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) as well as a number of other Government initiatives with a local development dimension.

The purpose of this study is threefold: firstly, it aims to identify the achievements of area-based local development initiatives in promoting social inclusion and sustainable communities. Secondly, the study assesses the influence of local development Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts on the institutional and policy landscape. The third and final goal is to outline the role and focus of local area-based Partnerships in prospective future social inclusion programmes and initiatives.

2 The Context

Area-based Partnerships, in their present form, were introduced in Ireland in 1991 under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP). Looking for new ways to tackle the problem of long-term unemployment in the worst-affected areas of the country, a new area-based strategy was designed in order to reproduce at local level the partnership approach implemented at national level by the previous national agreement, the Programme for National Recovery (PNR).

It is important to understand the social and political conjuncture that led to the introduction of area-based Partnerships in the early 1990s, particularly as successive Local Development Programmes have been more concerned to build up these local structures than to provide a clear statement of the more general assumptions that underlie the area-based approach. Furthermore, if we are interested in mapping out the future role of area-based Partnerships, this cannot be done without first developing a shared understanding of their *raison d'être*. This, in turn, will facilitate an evaluation of the effectiveness of current area-based Partnerships and enable us to assess whether the programmes under which they operate can be improved.

Three distinct processes led to the emergence of area-based Partnerships:

- * firstly, a concern about the persistence of high levels of long-term unemployment in certain communities and localities and, later on, a more general understanding of the importance of space with regard to multiple and cumulative deprivation;
- * secondly, a growing recognition of the constraints on the State's capacity to develop effective delivery mechanisms for its services at local level; and
- * thirdly, a change in the national partnership process, both in content and method.

In the next three sub-sections, we will discuss each of these three developments. As will become immediately apparent, the first two developments are not unique to Ireland, but are common to all European countries and indeed to the OECD area as a whole. It is therefore not surprising that in order to determine the future role of area-based Partnerships in Ireland, it is necessary to take account of broader trends and experiences in the EU and OECD countries.

2.1 Space Matters

Area-based initiatives to combat social deprivation tend to achieve prominence when the social cohesion of society is threatened due to the effects of social disadvantage and exclusion. The emergence of successive regional development programmes in Ireland during the 1920s, 1950s and 1960s was arguably a response to the emigration rates that prevailed during these decades. The emigration issue posed a challenge to the Government because of its demoralising consequences, particularly in rural areas.

2.1.1 A political response to uneven development

Many of the urban-based initiatives adopted in the US during the 1970s and in the UK during the 1980s were designed as an explicit response to civil unrest and riots in the most disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. Similarly, the housing programmes which commenced during the 1980s in Northern Ireland may best be understood as a response to the demands of the civil rights movement in preceding years. Finally, the initiatives taken in EU and OECD member countries during the 1990s are, at least in part, a response to the spatially-uneven outcomes of economic restructuring following the rapid globalisation of economic development during the 1970s and 1980s. They therefore represent an attempt to maintain political cohesion in regions that have paid a high price as a result of restructuring.

As a consequence, area-based initiatives tend to be invoked in the context of 'crisis' situations, and this in itself encourages inflated expectations and an attendant risk of losing sight of what such initiatives can realistically achieve. This explains why there tends to be a cyclical element to the way in which area-based responses come into vogue for relatively short periods of time before gradually fading away. After a period of strong popular support for area-based policies to reduce the incidence of multiple deprivation in the UK during the late 1960s and 1970s, for example, many of its previously ardent supporters became disillusioned as they came to realise that the spatial distribution of poverty was highly resilient to public interventions.

Professor Peter Townsend provides a good example of this shift on the part of many latter-day advocates of area-based interventions:

"...an area strategy cannot be the cardinal means of dealing with poverty or 'under-privilege'. However we come to define economically or socially deprived areas, unless we include nearly half the areas in the country, there will be more poor persons or poor children living outside them than in them ... moreover, the area deprivation policies of recent years ... actually reinforce inequality and dependence. This can arise by labeling of areas, and through their loss of status, scare off potential development."¹

A similar change in outlook is now becoming evident in Ireland amongst some of the strongest supporters of local development programmes over the last decade². The main argument put forward is that the majority of poor people do not reside in clearly-identifiable 'poor' areas, and that area-based initiatives should not therefore be the main policy instrument for combating poverty and deprivation. Instead, this requires comprehensive responses, including the restructuring of the tax and social welfare systems and equitable infrastructural and human resource programmes.

Views such as these - which either treat space as an optional extra to public policy or which see spatial and non-spatial dimensions as mutually exclusive - fail to grasp the unique contribution of space to the creation and perpetuation of cumulative disadvantage and deprivation.

2.1.2 Understanding multiple deprivation

We strongly agree that area-based responses should not substitute for structural policy responses. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) therefore remains pivotal to targeting social exclusion in Ireland, and any attempt to elevate area responses to the status of 'prime mover' in the fight against social exclusion are ill-advised.

However, there remains a strong rationale for retaining and even broadening the remit of area-based local development initiatives. The reason for this lies with the often

1 Townsend (1979) Poverty in the United Kingdom, pp 560-1.

2 Nolan, B. and Whelan, C.T. (1999) Loading the Dice - A Study of Cumulative Disadvantage. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency

poorly-understood cumulative effects which occur as a result of the clustering of distinct forms of deprivation amongst particular social groups and/or in specific neighbourhoods. This is frequently referred to as multiple deprivation, but it is more precise to speak of neighbourhood effects. In fact, a large body of international research has developed over the past ten to fifteen years around the conceptualisation and measurement of such effects. Because of the significance of neighbourhood effects to the arguments advanced here, we provide a brief overview of the international research literature in Appendix Three.

Where poverty and social exclusion are attributable to a lack of resources available to individuals and families, income transfers in the form of tax allowances and social welfare payments, as well as means-tested access to free services, should provide the principal axes of our social welfare system. Every citizen experiencing adverse economic circumstances has a right to these benefits, and the provision of adequate benefits and services lies at the core of a more equitable society.

Neighbourhood effects, in contrast, refer to those factors which affect the life chances of individuals over and above what could be predicted from their individual socio-economic circumstances. Two examples will suffice to highlight both their existence and immense importance. The first involves rural communities that have experienced extreme labour market disadvantage in the form of a simultaneous decline in demand for agricultural labour and an absence of alternative job opportunities. As a consequence, many of the children who grew up in marginal farming households have emigrated. Clearly, we can no longer measure the degree of deprivation in areas such as these on the basis of their unemployment level. Nevertheless, few would disagree that they are highly deprived, even though there may not be large concentrations of deprived people.

The second example comes from the educational sector, and applies mainly to deprived urban areas. It is known that children from disadvantaged family backgrounds tend to have lower educational achievements than children from more privileged backgrounds. However, children from disadvantaged backgrounds who share their school environment with other poor children have a much greater risk (up to one-and-a-half times greater) of becoming an 'educational failure' than those who study alongside children from more affluent homes³. This is an example of a 'neighbourhood effect', and sophisticated statistical techniques have been developed in recent years that enable us to quantify the impact of the wider social context on individual educational outcomes. Although the study of neighbourhood effects is celebrated as a great advance in social science methodology, it is striking that no such studies have yet been undertaken in Ireland (see Appendix Three).

These examples show the fundamental error that occurs when measures of spatial deprivation are based on the characteristics of poor people alone, rather than applying a wider concept of deprivation which also takes into account the structural limitations that curtail people's life chances and opportunities, including their shared environment. It is our contention that local development initiatives can play an important role in countering the additional disadvantage encountered by people living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

2.1.3 Area-based Initiatives and Local Development Programmes

The OPLURD (1994-1999) explicitly acknowledged the complementary role of area-based initiatives: "The Operational Programme recognises the general role which local initiatives can play as a catalyst for local economic, social and environmental development and the particular importance of locally-based measures to complement the national approach and to release the local potential for development" (OPLURD, 1995, p 11).⁴

This sentiment was strongly endorsed by the ESRI's Mid-Term Evaluation of OPLURD, which stated:

"At about £1 million per county per year the resources being provided are by no means enormous. Yet there is no doubt that the availability of even these relatively modest

3 Willms, J.D. (1992) *Monitoring School Performance - A Guide to Educators*. Bristol: The Falmer Press.

4 Government of Ireland (1995) *Operational Programme: Local Urban and Rural Development*. Dublin: Stationary Office.

funds has galvanised local initiative throughout the country. Even if quantification of results (in terms of the pre-established indicators) has not been made available, it is clear that, in the short-run, the gains have been considerable and have been broadly in the directions intended" (Honohan, 1997, p 70).⁵

The cumulative disadvantage experienced by communities residing in the areas designated under successive Local Development Programmes is due to the spatial clustering of poverty and therefore cannot be measured accurately using individual attributes alone. In urban areas, the disadvantage of individuals and communities may coincide (as is generally the case in public housing estates), leading to the mistaken perception that the individual and area levels are in alignment. However, this does not apply more generally, particularly in deprived rural areas.

Furthermore, if the most important element of cumulative disadvantage lies with the spatial clustering of deprivation, i.e. over and above that accounted for by individual experiences, then any strategy to alleviate such neighbourhood effects must include actions which are not directed at any specific individuals living in that community or locality.

Neither the OPLURD nor the LDSIP have provided a satisfactory definition of cumulative disadvantage, nor have they specified the remedies needed in order to reverse the decline of deprived areas, be they rural or urban. Thus, the gradual shift in successive local development programmes towards a model in which area-based initiatives are concerned more with specific target groups (individual-level approach) than with tackling the cumulative aspects of deprivation (area-level approach) needs to be evaluated critically.

2.2 The Need for Local Responses

The problems which area-based Partnerships in Ireland seek to address are common to many if not all of the EU and OECD countries: "The division of Irish society into a substantial majority that prospers from the new, highly flexible economy and a minority that subsist, un- or underemployed, with public assistance at the margins of this prosperity is one that, in one form or another, besets almost all advanced countries. The failure of centrally conceived and administered programmes of welfare, training, and job creation to mitigate this division is, again, the rule in the advanced countries, not the Irish exception" (Sabel, 1996, p.11).⁶

Whilst partly building on the EU Anti-poverty Programmes of the 1980s, the development of area-based Partnerships under successive local development programmes, negotiated as part of the wider social partnership process, are unique to Ireland and exemplary in their form. It is therefore not surprising that the EU and OECD have taken a particular interest in the Irish experience and that there are now similar area-based initiatives in many EU countries.

2.2.1 The project of "democratic experimentalism"

The conditions for the development of area-based Partnerships in Ireland were particularly conducive in the early 1990s, due to the existence of a highly centralised state apparatus, to the virtual intransigence of unemployment - but especially long-term unemployment - in the face of existing policy measures and the need to accelerate administrative change in the context of a dramatically accelerating economy. However, the underlying need for greater flexibility in responding to the needs of local communities is common to all developed countries. To illustrate the fundamental change that has occurred with respect to the organisation of public administration, Sabel draws a parallel with changes observed in the productive sector of the economy.

Since the Second World War, industrial production has been dominated by Taylorist systems of work organisation which exploit economies of scale. Efficiency is achieved by allocating product design to a person, or group of persons, with in-depth knowledge of market possibilities and production techniques. This facilitates the subdivision of production into highly specialised and therefore highly productive tasks. However, as

5 Patrick Honohan (Ed.) (1997) EU Structural Funds in Ireland - A Mid-Term Evaluation of the CSF 1994-99. Dublin: ESRI.

6 Charles Sabel (1996) Ireland - Local Partnerships and Social Innovation. Paris: OECD.

markets have become more turbulent, and the combination of fluctuations in the level of demand and changes in technology have shortened product life cycles, those highly-centralised production techniques have sometimes proved inadequate and in some cases systems based on 'flexible specialisation' have emerged. This production system facilitates the re-integration of conception and execution through a highly disciplined form of decentralisation of authority in the design and production of goods and services. Decentralisation allows productive units to reduce the costs of solving problems in their area of specialisation by exploiting 'economies of scope'. The relevance of this to the present study is, as Sabel argues, a similar change may be necessary within the public administration.

The origins of area-based Partnerships in Ireland and other European countries can be traced to the growing realisation by key actors in central Government that they could extend the limits of their directive capacity⁷ by decentralising authority. In Ireland, it was notably the Department of the Taoiseach which, towards the end of the 1980s, "came to this conclusion after recognising that economic stabilisation and the growth it made possible could not alone improve the life prospects of the most vulnerable groups, and, further, that the then-current combination of centralised economic development and welfare programmes could not accomplish what growth through concerted stabilisation could. This two-fold crisis in development and welfare policy then prompted a search for alternatives that led quickly to the discovery of novel, local forms of public-private partnership - some growing out of EU programmes in rural areas, others out of the immediate political concern of the social partners themselves - as the institutional vehicle for escaping the blockages at the centre" (Sabel, 1996, p.15).

Whether the Irish public administration can actually learn from the innovations that they have triggered remains an open question. At the time of evaluating the original twelve PESP Partnerships, Sabel came to the conclusion that the Government had so far failed to learn significantly from the experience of the Partnerships, whilst nevertheless arguing that this was not the only, or even the most important, problem with the Partnership system. He referred to the process by which Government extends its directive capacity through the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the achievements of decentralised local actors as "democratic experimentalism". It is possible to argue that a return to a highly centralised approach to economic development and welfare programmes will not provide the enhanced directive capacity that is needed.

In the next section, we will take a close look at the process by which the social partnership process has changed over time to give greater weight to local development.

2.3 The Changing Face of Social Partnership

The latest round of social partnership negotiations faced an unprecedented uphill struggle⁸. Economic growth, although still ahead of most other European countries, had slowed down considerably, particularly when compared to the rapid acceleration that occurred during the second half of the 1990s. The uncertainty about the future economic development had been exacerbated by lingering uncertainties about what exactly the negotiations should be about. Some participants saw no need for a national agreement at all, others were seeking an agreement confined to the core issues of wages, taxes and welfare because they are disappointed with the implementation of the structural and supply-side elements of previous agreements, whilst other actors who share this sense of disappointment were nevertheless pushing for the further development of supply-side elements within the context of a new agreement.

The various options for a new agreement were outlined in a discussion paper by Rory O'Donnell for the National Competitiveness Council⁹ prior to the commencement of the talks. Deliberating in considerable detail on the changes which the social partnership process has gone through over the past decade and a half, the paper argues that more rather than less attention needs to be given to developing the partnership approach with regard to supply-side infrastructure and services. We believe that the

⁷ The term 'directive capacity' refers to the ability of the State to organise its services in an effective and efficient manner; effective with regard to achieving its intended objectives and efficient by optimising value for money.

⁸ At the time of finalising the present report in April, 2003, the talks had just concluded, resulting in an interim agreement which effectively leaves many of the principal questions unsolved until the next negotiations.

⁹ Rory O'Donnell (2001) The Future of Social Partnership in Ireland. National Competitiveness Council. Available from: www.forfas.ie/ncc/pdfs/discussion_social_may01.pdf

arguments advanced in this paper are of significance to the issues raised in this study and that they can contribute to a better understanding of the present position of area-based Partnerships within the overall context of the social partnership process. We will therefore summarise the key observations made by O'Donnell in relation to the role of area-based Partnerships.

2.3.1 The Partnership process has changed both in content and method

When looking at the experience of the past fifteen years, it is apparent that social partnership has evolved in two ways. Over the five programmes since 1987, the emphasis of Partnership agreements has shifted from macroeconomic matters to structural and supply-side policies, and the range of supply-side issues under discussion has widened to address what are conceived to be key constraints on Irish growth, such as childcare and life-long learning. This change in the content of partnership agreements has involved a parallel change in method. While macroeconomic strategy can be discussed in the context of national negotiations, complex policies that cut across different areas of society, relating to issues such as social exclusion, training, business development and childcare cannot be devised effectively within the confines of high-level negotiations. Consequently, in order to address the growing number of supply-side issues, a wide array of working groups, 'frameworks' and 'forums' have evolved, involving representatives of the various social partners. In a few areas of policy, such as long-term unemployment, rural and urban regeneration and business development, new institutional arrangements have been created so as to involve actors on the ground. This dual evolution of partnership is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *The Dual Evolution of Partnership at National Level*



However, despite the opportunities generated by the unprecedented boom of the 1990s, most participants feel that the success rate of partnership in relation to structural and supply-side issues has been lower than in relation to macro issues. While we know how to do high-level bargaining, we are unsure about how to tackle multi-level problem-solving. Indeed, in most areas, the shift to multi-level problem-solving is limited, since the working groups remain composed of national representatives of the social partners.

2.3.2 Uncertainties at the outset of the current negotiations

One of O'Donnell's central arguments is that the anxieties discernible within the last round of negotiations can be explained by what he calls "the incompleteness of this dual evolution". Intensive discussions amongst the social partners have revealed a range of problems and frustrations that are directly related to the widened Partnership agenda¹⁰. Some participants feel that the emphasis on consensus prevents innovation and stifles debate, whilst others feel that the terms of the negotiations are unequal, employers and unions sharing a functional interdependence, whilst the community and voluntary sectors rely on a set of moral claims. Most partners report severe difficulties in linking their involvement in national-level policy-making with the local action of their members. Whilst recognising the significant achievements of partnership, almost all groups express frustration at the failure to translate national agreements into real change on the ground. Almost all participants identify the proliferation of partnership

¹⁰ NES (1997).

bodies as a problem, and perhaps the most important issue is the inadequacy of monitoring arrangements within the partnership system itself. Although the partners originally pressed for the creation of monitoring systems, in private they now admit the limitations of the system that has emerged, where they merely interrogate civil servants on the progress of a wide range of initiatives.

Some of these uncertainties came to the fore during the current round of partnership discussions in a way that did not occur in the past. One instinct is to pull back from the profusion of issues that are emerging and from the complexities entailed by participation in this process in favour of a partnership approach confined to the core distributional parameters: wages, taxes and welfare. Another is to limit the role of partnership altogether and to return to a less cumbersome form of executive decision-making and implementation. Yet another option is to declare that it is impossible for Government to solve these complex supply-side problems and to hand them over to the market. Thus, one set of processes favours the decentralisation and devolution of public authority, whilst another reinforces central control over strategy and policy-making. Each of these tendencies reflects real limitations in the system of government as it currently exists, and these must be the starting-point for any analysis of future trends. In fact, O'Donnell's main argument is that the handling of structural and supply-side policies constitutes the major challenge facing Irish public policy and social partnership at this point in time.

2.4 Summarising the Context

To recapitulate the main points made in this chapter, the following issues provide a useful starting-point for an evaluation of the future role of area-based Partnerships:

- * Poverty and social exclusion exist throughout the whole of the country and demand comprehensive structural responses in terms of income transfers, social welfare entitlements and free access to services for those with insufficient means to participate fully in society.
- * However, poverty and social exclusion are also concentrated in particular communities and localities, where their clustering and the co-existence of multiple forms of deprivation result in additional forms of deprivation over and above those that can be predicted on the basis of individual characteristics. In the academic literature, these are referred to as neighbourhood effects.
- * Neighbourhood effects have been the subject of extensive study in the United States and elsewhere, although similar research has yet to be carried out in the Irish context. Nevertheless, people intuitively acknowledge their existence by moving house, for example, so that their children have the opportunity to attend particular schools, and when people suffer discrimination during job applications because they come from a particular area.
- * Area-based initiatives which complement structural supply-side measures ultimately derive their justification from the existence of these additional forms of deprivation which cannot be overcome by interventions targeted at individuals alone.
- * The fact that local development measures have become a consistent part of successive Government programmes, as well as the setting up of a wide array of institutional structures based on the partnership approach at regional and national level, show that central Government and the social partners recognise that centralised approaches to planning economic development and welfare programmes alone are unlikely to be sufficient to tackle disadvantage in the most marginalised communities.
- * Area-based Partnerships, together with a system of regional and national partnership institutions, provide an interface which allows Government to develop an enhanced directive capacity by utilising the knowledge gained from new forms of democratic experimentalism.
- * Questions remain, however, regarding the integration of the experience of area-based Partnerships into the wider policy-making process and in relation to the most effective institutional organisation at local level.

3 The Achievements of Area-based Partnerships¹¹

In evaluating the achievements of the area-based Partnerships, we should avoid drawing sharp distinctions between the different local development programmes. New issues are often identified at one point in time, followed by the establishment of pilot projects, with more programmatic responses developing gradually over time. For this reason, we will concentrate on the overall achievements of the area-based Partnerships and the extension of the partnership process to local level. We will then provide a more detailed assessment of the involvement of the Partnerships in a range of different areas.

3.1 Objectives under Successive Local Development Programmes

3.1.1 From PESP and Global Grant to OPLURD

Before evaluating the achievements of the Partnerships, it is useful to reflect briefly on their key objectives. Indeed, the objectives of the Partnerships have changed over time, reflecting the (rapidly) changing economic environment and the experience of previous phases of local development.

The original objectives of the area-based Partnerships were strongly focused on the persistence of long-term unemployment in particular unemployment blackspots. This was clearly perceived as a pilot initiative, and as such was seen to have achieved its objectives¹², pioneering a way of setting up local area-based Partnerships. The major objective under the Global Grant (1991-1993) was to prepare for the extension of the partnership approach to the most objectively deprived areas throughout Ireland. Whilst the programme started to explore some of the key issues which later became objectives under the OPLURD (1994-1999), the Global Grant period itself concentrated first and foremost on the process by which the 38 Partnership companies and 33 Community Groups would be formed, including the systematic introduction of local area action plans as a means of facilitating a coordinated and strategic approach at local level¹³.

The OPLURD represented a pivotal phase in the recent history of local development in Ireland, as this was the first time that local development was accorded a separate Operational Programme. The programme also reached its widest remit under the OPLURD, including substantial measures on enterprises, disadvantaged areas and urban and village renewal. A very large number of people benefited from the resulting local development initiatives and the programme achieved considerable public recognition. However, there were also considerable ambiguities at the institutional level regarding the underlying democratic remit of the OPLURD, and this led to a fundamental review of local development structures and ultimately to the emergence of the County Development Boards¹⁴.

3.1.2 The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP)

Unlike the National Development Plan for the 1994-1999 period, the present NDP does not contain a separate Operational Programme dealing with local development, and social inclusion measures have instead been incorporated into a number of Operational Programmes. In addition, the NDP features two Regional Operational Programmes which aim to overcome some of the regional imbalances which characterise the Irish case. The Local Development Measure is one of six Measures within the Social Inclusion Sub-Programme of the two Regional Operational Programmes, namely: (i) Childcare, (ii) Equality, (iii) Community Development/Family Support, (iv) Crime Prevention, (v) Youth Services, and (vi) Local Development.

11 Please note again, and as outlined at the outset of the report, that the term area-based Partnerships is used here to refer to the combined Partnership Companies and Local Community Groups.

12 Sarah Craig and Kieran McKeown (1994) Progress through Partnership - Final Evaluation Report on the PESP Pilot Initiative on Long-term Unemployment. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

13 Trutz Haase and Kieran McKeown (1996) Local Development Strategies for Disadvantaged Areas - Evaluation of the Global Grant in Ireland (1992-1995). Dublin: ADM.

14 Goodbody Economic Consultants (1997) Mid-term Evaluation of the OPLURD.

The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme provides funding for the Partnerships and Community Groups, and encompasses three areas:

Measure A - Services for the Unemployed	(40 - 65%)
Measure B - Community Development	(25 - 40%)
Measure C - Community-based Youth Initiatives	(15 - 25%)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate budget parameters under each measure.

3.2 General Achievements of Partnerships

In this section we will highlight the most important achievements of the Partnerships over the past decade. We will deliberately take a long-term perspective, relating the achievements of the Partnerships above all to the broader objectives of successive local development programmes and to the contextual considerations outlined in the previous chapter. As will be immediately apparent, the analysis that follows (with the exception of the first section, which deals with throughputs) is based on an indirect and informal assessment of the achievements of the Partnerships. We believe that the Partnerships have accomplished major achievements. It must be noted, however, that little hard evidence is available to verify these achievements. In fact, many of the achievements of the Partnerships relate to their *modus operandi*, and have been documented in a narrative fashion, mainly through the local evaluation studies that describe the establishment of specific initiatives.

ADM has made some progress in advancing the scope of evaluation by developing a framework of performance indicators at programme level. These are outlined in Section 5, and particularly Sub-section 5.5 of the Programme Guidelines¹⁵. However, only the first out of the six 'Over-arching Performance Indicators' is concerned with both immediate impacts (evidence of greater life chances, opportunities) as well as general impacts (a more equitable status for the target groups), whilst the other five remain essentially concerned with the evaluation of processes (evidence of target group participation, evidence of collective processes in decision-making, evidence of commitment to the concept of partnership, evidence of multi-sectoral, multi-faceted approaches, evidence to influence mainstream policy, delivery and practices). Where final impacts, as opposed to impacts on processes, are being evaluated (e.g. the progression of individuals into education, training, employment and self-employment) impact evaluation has remained limited to the effect on the individual. To date, we therefore know little about the overall effect of the Partnerships' work on the relative life chances of the target groups and communities or their improvement relative to the rest of the population as set out in the first of the Primary Indicators.

In fairness, such evaluation demands extraordinary scope and resources and thus lies effectively outside the scope of what can be undertaken by ADM. Indeed, the monitoring requirements for the LDSIP in the context of the National Development Plan are confined to a small number of output and result indicators set by the Regional Assemblies and the CSF Evaluation Unit in consultation with ADM. Therefore, we will know very little about the net impact of the operational achievements and results from the NDP. There exists no framework for the assessment of impact of the NDP and while we acknowledge the efforts by ADM to develop more comprehensive impact indicators, the overall responsibilities of developing a framework for the assessment of impact is likely to ultimately lie with the Regional Assemblies and the CSF Evaluation Unit. The next sub-sections therefore outline the major achievements of the Partnerships and Community Groups predominantly at the operational level.

3.2.1 Ability to reach and target those who are most excluded from full participation in society

The activities of the Partnerships have reached hundreds of thousands of people over the past decade. During the OPLURD alone, the Partnerships supported approximately 100,000 unemployed people, either through enterprise supports or services for the

15 ADM (2000) Local Development Social Inclusion Programme Guidelines 2000 - 2006.

unemployed, and another 100,000 predominantly young people from disadvantaged backgrounds received complementary education and training or participated in preventive education programmes.

Most importantly, however, the Partnerships offered access to jobs, job search skills and education where these had never before been available. Concentrating on those communities and localities which had failed to benefit from the improved economic environment of the 1990s, the Partnerships set out to identify unmet needs and to develop new and more effective ways of delivering statutory services. Partnerships have opened up new avenues of service provision, overcoming some of the obstacles experienced by marginalised groups in accessing centralised state services.

3.2.2 Proven track record of establishing linkages across a variety of service providers

One of the most important features of multiple deprivation is that treating its effects requires a multifaceted approach. From the beginning of the local development programmes in the early 1990s, the difficulties involved in reaching the most disadvantaged communities were due, at least in part, to the fact that the organisation of the main Government services - such as education, training and health, but also transport and support for job creation - were highly centralised and consequently lacked the degree of coordination necessary in order to reach the most disadvantaged communities.

The area-based Partnerships have been at the forefront of a shift in attitudes with regard to the co-ordination of service delivery. The first major breakthrough was the creation of the innovative Local Employment Service, which provides long-term unemployed individuals with a client-centred, one-stop access point to all local services. Another high-profile example comes from the hundreds of initiatives that facilitate a closer interaction between local schools and students' homes with the aim of counteracting educational disadvantage and early school-leaving.

Wherever area-based Partnerships, Community Groups and Local Employment Pacts exist, they are typically at the centre of these initiatives. The new local development structures, and notably the County Development Boards, should be seen as the outcome of the new approach to the coordination of services associated with the Partnerships. The need for improved links between different local service providers is now widely accepted, particularly as far as disadvantaged communities are concerned.

3.2.3 A proven track record in encouraging a collaborative approach at local level in responding to all forms of social disadvantage

The early local development programmes were largely focused on the long-term unemployed. As the general upturn in the economy during the 1990s resulted in significant inroads being made on the long-term unemployment rate, the Partnerships became increasingly involved with other target groups, including Travellers, small farmers, young people at risk, drug users, people with disabilities, disadvantaged women and many other groups at risk of social marginalisation.

Area-based Partnerships have been at the forefront in developing integrated approaches with respect to each of the emerging target groups. Building on the positive experiences of developing a client-centred approach to tackling long-term unemployment, the Partnerships have been involved in a vast number of innovative educational projects which explore the interfaces between home and school, between different schools, and between schools, training centers and workplaces. The Partnerships have recently developed initiatives for target groups such as lone parents, elderly people, travellers and smallholders, as well as immigrants and drug users. The latter are relatively new target groups and raise questions in relation to institutional responses. The Partnerships also had an important influence in the creation of the Drugs Task Force.

3.2.4 Ability to assess, interpret and respond to individual and local needs

One of the key practices institutionalised within the area-based Partnerships is the development of local area action plans. The purposes of these plans are manifold, but include the following key elements:

- they bring together at local level the chief stakeholders, including community representatives, the social partners, elected representatives and staff from relevant Government departments and state agencies;
- they provide a framework in which it is possible to identify, interpret and assess the concerns brought forward by stakeholders;
- they provide a structure for evaluating the relative importance of various issues and can generate a consensus about how local needs should be met.

The value of local area action plans - as introduced by the area-based Partnerships since the Global Grant - has been recognised outside the context of social disadvantage. For example, the development of a framework for consultation and participation in relation to local planning was a central plank of the 1999 Dublin City Development Plan. The Plan states that "it is the policy of Dublin Corporation to foster local community development through recognition of community identities, provide corporation services at the local level and participate with communities in the preparation of local plans"¹⁶. A large number of local area plans are currently in preparation throughout Dublin City and it is widely recognised that a transparent and participatory approach to planning is beneficial to the quality of the proposed developments themselves, as well as enhancing a sense of community belonging amongst those who are directly affected.

3.2.5 Experience of developing and delivering innovative responses to meeting local needs

This is possibly the core activity of the area-based Partnerships. From their inception, the question for Partnerships has been how services and their delivery can be changed in order to achieve greater effectiveness. We have already alluded to the example of client-centred approaches to meeting the needs of the long-term unemployed and to creating closer links between schools and parents in order to combat early school-leaving.

A number of features have the potential to make the area-based Partnerships particularly effective in developing and delivering innovative responses to meeting local needs:

- firstly, the Partnerships can act as a conduit between recipients and providers of a given service;
- secondly, the Partnerships have links with all local service providers, facilitating a coordinated approach involving a variety of service providers at local level;
- thirdly, the Partnerships have developed extensive networks through which they can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and horizontal learning;
- fourthly, because of the multiplicity of local Partnerships, a programmatic approach and simultaneous implementation of similar initiatives across all Partnerships can produce collective knowledge over and above what might be gained from individual pilot projects.

These processes clearly lie at the core of Sabel's notion of democratic experimentalism. However, a clear distinction needs to be made between the Partnerships' innate ability to develop and deliver innovative responses in the alleviation of social problems, their actual performance, their ability to demonstrate their achievements and the ability of the State's institutions to learn and generalise from this experience.

16 Dublin City Development Plan (1999).

3.2.6 Building Community Capacity

Addressing the problems that arise from the cumulative aspects of deprivation inevitably involves the community. The active participation of the community is a prerequisite to accurately identifying unmet needs, to developing a strategic approach to improve the situation of those who are marginalized and socially excluded, as well as the active participation in the pursuit of the strategies thus identified. The area-based Partnerships and Community Groups provide the local partnership forum through which this can happen. They also provide the essential assistance to local groups and communities to enhance their capacity so that they can meaningfully participate in this process.

It is probably fair to say that the Partnerships have, over the past decade, become the single most important actor in this respect. More than 1,000 community organisations were assisted during the OPLURD alone, mainly through capacity-building measures such as the training of community activists, funding of community workers, the provision of technical assistance and project funding. Another important factor is the Partnerships' role in supporting local networks and fora, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and the building of linkages between communities. All of these are important elements in creating the conditions for the development of a more coherent community sector that is able to develop and articulate strategies and access decision-making and policy-influencing structures. Today, the Partnerships have become one of the primary institutional frameworks within which community concerns can be transmitted to the relevant Government departments and state agencies.

The community development literature points out that social exclusion cannot be overcome without effective community participation, and whilst the achievements of the Partnerships in this respect may not be perfect, they nevertheless point in the right direction¹⁷. The building of community links is an explicit objective of the LDSIP and, to this end, the progress achieved is monitored through a number of indicators. However, it is not clear whether the building of community capacity is an end in itself, or whether there is an onus on the Partnerships (or someone else) to demonstrate that the effective building of community capacity helps to address the degree of deprivation experienced by the most disadvantaged communities and areas, or the people living therein.

3.2.7 The ethos of working in partnership with state agencies and community organisations

The relationship between local community organisations and state agencies is frequently characterised by tension. The reason for this is relatively simple: local community organisations tend to arise precisely where people are most dissatisfied with state agencies. On the other hand, state agencies frequently find it difficult to respond to the demands advanced by a myriad of local initiatives. The highly-centralised bureaucratic system of government currently in existence simply does not have the capacity or structures to respond to these demands, regardless of their value.

The area-based Partnerships, however, provide a unique interface which facilitates interaction between local community organisations and state agencies. As a result of their experience on the ground, the Partnerships claim to have won considerable respect from local communities and state agencies. Although this seems highly plausible, the authors would like to note that we do not have independent evidence to support this claim. For the local community organisations, the Partnerships seem to provide a means of articulating their concerns and bringing them 'to the table'. For state agencies, the area-based Partnerships provide a streamlined means of listening to the concerns of a wide range of community organisations. Of course, this process is not without contradictions. There are still many groups which feel that they are not being listened to, and the responsiveness of various Government departments and state agencies also varies greatly. But there is little doubt that the Partnerships are at the forefront of broadening the partnership approach at local level.

¹⁷ For a recent critical evaluation of community representation see Brian Harvey (2002) *The Role of the Community Sector in Local Social Partnership - a study of the community sector's capacity to participate in local social partnership structures*. Dublin: ADM.

3.2.8 Administrative capacity - systems and structures already in place

The institution of area-based Partnerships has revolutionised the community development sector over the past decade. The establishment of local institutions with a small but secure administrative budget has allowed a degree of professionalisation within the sector which could not otherwise have occurred.

On the one hand, this process has mobilised hundreds of local activists to work in a concerted way towards an agreed strategic programme within their locality. On the other hand, administrative staff and local actors have been empowered by the large variety of support programmes provided by ADM over a number of years.

Today, the Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts provide a structure for putting in place new programmes aimed at alleviating social exclusion. They are able to plan and co-ordinate interventions, to mobilise at local level and to make prudent use of public funding. Because of the similarity of experiences between different local Partnerships, due to the existence of horizontal structures to facilitate mutual learning and as a result of the support structures provided by ADM, the Partnerships have gained an impressive track record in project development and management and in the handling of staff and budgets. It should be noted, however, that the Partnerships are also subject to a number of risks, some of which are associated with their own successes.

Firstly, area-based Partnerships have become a significant delivery agent of social inclusion measures at local level. However, a significant proportion of the actions involved are indistinguishable from one Partnership to another (e.g. supports for the long-term unemployed, the running of homework clubs, home-school and inter-school liaison initiatives, etc.) and one has to question whether these services have any significant innovative content. There may be a case for showing the local representatives of Government departments and state agencies that an inter-agency approach can be effective. However, it would clearly be more effective for these institutions to learn these lessons from the results of evaluation studies carried out at a central level.

Secondly, there is a danger that the delivery of social inclusion measures becomes an end in itself. In this case, rather than even aspiring to learn from innovative actions with a view to improving the design and delivery of mainstream state services, the Partnerships may end up running an 'ambulance service' which picks up the pieces where the statutory services have failed.

Thirdly, and following on from the previous points, there is a temptation for Government to transfer a disparate range of initiatives aimed at those who are socially excluded to the area-based Partnerships. Indeed, it is the consultants' belief that this tendency is already evident in the present LDSIP.

It is not disputed here that the area-based Partnerships should have a role in the delivery of social exclusion measures at local level. Their involvement in a variety of cross-sectional initiatives is essential to the development of a coherent local development strategy and also serves to underline the role of the Partnerships as advocates of the partnership approach at local level. However, the aforementioned risks have the potential to undermine the strategic orientation and focus of the Partnerships themselves and to reduce their capacity for innovation, which we believe to be central to their existence.

3.2.9 Commitment to monitoring and evaluating work at all stages of development and delivery

As we showed in our earlier discussion of the context in which the area-based Partnerships operate, one of the central aims behind the extension of the partnership model to the local level is the extension of the directive capacity of government. One element of this is that hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged people can be reached through the activities of the Partnerships and Community Groups. The other element, however - and perhaps the more important one - is the potential that this creates for central Government and the state agencies to learn from the innovative approaches by the Partnerships and thus the chance to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their services.

Monitoring and evaluation at all stages of development and delivery are thus pivotal to the work of the Partnerships and Community Groups, their intermediate management organisation, ADM, and the Regional Monitoring Committees. Under the OPLURD, ADM developed a Performance Monitoring System which was unequalled by any of the other Operational Programmes. This system has since been further expanded in consultation with the Partnerships and Community Groups to the SCOPE system. The system collects the output and result indicators as set out in the performance indicator framework, including information on initiatives, networks and collaborations, enterprise, job placement and education and training. The system is also designed to gather information on the progression of individuals and groups. In addition to this, ADM has been involved in a large number of evaluations which capture the more qualitative aspects of their innovative work. In July 2000, ADM published a Research Directory which details some 350 studies undertaken by Partnerships and Community Groups under the OPLURD¹⁸.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the considerable energy dedicated to the collection of data on all relevant target groups, throughputs and progression, there remains a fundamental question in relation to the actual impact of the actions developed by the Partnerships on the degree of deprivation experienced by the most disadvantaged communities. There is an urgent need to formulate a framework for an overall impact evaluation as well as the need to clarify whose responsibility it is to develop such a framework. In the absence of such impact evaluation, and particularly in the context of the comparatively narrow evaluation criteria for the LDSIP, the consultants have the impression that processes and throughputs are at danger of becoming an end in themselves. This development has become more prevalent as increasing emphasis is being given to meeting targets under each of successive local development programmes. ADM and the Partnerships in turn seem to feel under constant pressure to justify their existence and have responded by concentrating on the number of beneficiaries reached through their actions and on the detailed documentation of this throughput.

Having evaluated the work of the area-based Partnerships under successive local development programmes over the past decade, the consultants have become increasingly critical of this dynamic. In the consultants' view, the ability to reach the intended target groups alone, or even the progression of individuals, does not suffice to justify the existence of area-based Partnerships. Instead, greater emphasis needs to be given to the evaluation of the impact of the Partnerships' activities both on the actual level of deprivation experienced in the most disadvantaged areas and the relative life chances of their residents. It is the learning process rooted in their innovative actions which constitutes the greatest asset of the area-based initiatives.

3.2.10 History of using monitoring and evaluation to inform practice and policy

Some of the approaches piloted by the Partnerships have led to far-reaching changes in the general approach adopted by state agencies in the delivery of their services. The client-centred approach to assisting the long-term unemployed is probably one of the earliest and most far-reaching of these. Another change relates to FÁS, which was targeted for harsh criticism during the 1970s and 1980s for its failure to target disadvantaged groups within the labour market. Most commentators now acknowledge the considerable advances that FÁS has made over the past decade in making its services more client-oriented. Today, the co-operation between Partnerships and the training agency at local level represents one of the more positive outcomes of the Partnerships' work.

The Partnerships also have a significant presence in the education sector, where they have been centrally involved in piloting actions aimed at assisting students with an educational disadvantage, from pre-school initiatives, through home-work clubs at primary and secondary level, home-school liaison initiatives, initiatives to enhance the transition from primary to second level and programmes that help students from disadvantaged backgrounds to access third-level education. Horizontal learning, i.e.

18 ADM (2000) Local Development Programme Research Database Directory. Dublin: ADM.

the exchange of experience between Partnerships, is supported through the network of education co-ordinators, as well as through national conferences¹⁹ and policy papers²⁰.

The involvement of the Partnerships in the running of the LES and the decision to give ADM responsibility for the implementation of RAPID, the Rural Transport Initiative, the Childcare Initiative, and the Millennium Fund for Access to Third Level Education all testify to the ability of the area-based Partnerships to implement programmes with major lessons for wider practices and policies. However, despite the very considerable commitment of ADM and the Partnerships to monitoring and evaluation, it must nevertheless be admitted that the current system has significant shortcomings, due to no fault of the Partnerships or ADM.

The consultants see ample evidence of 'horizontal learning' between Partnerships, including evaluation at local level (as documented by over 350 local evaluation studies), the dissemination of key lessons to be learned (as in the Insight series, for example²¹) and the transferral of models of best practice from one Partnership to another. Indeed, when we compare the work of area-based Partnerships and Community Groups, it is possible to argue that many of the Partnerships are now involved in similar activities. Whilst this would not be a problem if the main purpose of the Partnerships were simply to carry out certain activities, it is potentially a drawback if we give a greater role to innovation and the evaluation of different approaches to tackling poverty in a comparative research framework.

In the absence of a comparative evaluation framework such as this, however, the ability of the Partnership experience to inform the policies of Government departments and state agencies is unclear. Whilst there may be an underlying reluctance amongst the latter to draw on the Partnerships' experience, it is also apparent that the Partnerships themselves have not drawn clear enough lessons from their own experiences. At the very least, they have so far failed to clearly documented the impact of their innovative approaches to tackling deprivation. As a result, 'vertical learning' in terms of mainstreaming and influencing larger-scale programmes leaves much to be desired.

3.2.11 Putting the identification of the most disadvantaged areas on an objective footing

The successful designation of Partnership areas in preparation for the OPLURD may be included amongst the achievements of the Partnerships. Following the completion of the pilot initiative to combat long-term unemployment under the PESP, there was a view in the Department of the Taoiseach and ADM that in order to fulfil the Government's commitment to expanding the area-based approach nationwide, the designation of the new Partnership areas needed to be based on an objective measure of relative deprivation. The work commissioned by ADM led to the development of a widely-used Index of Relative Affluence and Deprivation²². Not only has this Index been instrumental in enabling each Partnership to identify those localities of greatest need within their remit, it has also provided a basis for a transparent and equitable process of resource allocation between the Partnerships²³. Furthermore, the Index has since been used by a number of Government departments in order to target additional resources at disadvantaged areas throughout Ireland, thus complementing the area-based approach of the Partnerships.

3.2.12 Assessing the overall impact

Finally, one has to look at the overall impact which the area-based Partnerships have had on the level of deprivation experienced within the most disadvantaged areas since their inception in the early 1990s. Unfortunately, this is extremely difficult to assess given the data which currently exists. As mentioned earlier, the annual expenditure on area-based initiatives is minuscule compared to total Government spending, amounting to only a fraction of one per cent. Moreover, the unprecedented economic growth over the past decade has resulted in a significant reduction in unemployment and

19 ADM (1999) Partnership in Education - Learning the Lessons from Local Development.

20 ADM (2001) Partnerships and ADM Community Groups: Key Issues and Considerations for Education.

21 To date, the Insight series comprises 23 publications.

22 Trutz Haase (1999) Affluence and Deprivation - A spatial analysis based on the 1996 Census of Population.

23 Trutz Haase (1996) Resource Allocation Model for Area Partnership Companies.

particularly long-term unemployment, as well as a significant reduction in the proportion of population who are 'consistently' poor. At the same time, not everyone has benefited from the economic upturn, and the proportion of households falling below the relative income thresholds of half of average income was higher in 2000 than in 1997 or 1994²⁴. Without a complex econometric regional model it is impossible to say what the unemployment rates in the most disadvantaged areas might have been without the local development programmes.

Looking at just the twelve PESP partnership areas, a comparison of the 1991 and 1996 Census data reveals no conclusive evidence about the net effect of the Partnerships on the prevailing unemployment rate. Unemployment rates in these areas fell by a marginally greater absolute margin than in the rest of the country, but by a smaller relative margin. For this reason, the external evaluators of OPLURD described this data as inconclusive²⁵. They did, however, find that in a case study from Limerick there was clear evidence of a disproportionate effect in the city's most disadvantaged unemployment blackspots. A broader test of the relative performance of all of the Partnership areas over the 1996 to 2001 period with regard to unemployment and deprivation cannot be undertaken until the area results from the 2002 Census of Population are released.

3.3 Activities and Progress under the LDSIP

In this section, we will look at the progress of the area-based Partnerships under the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme. From the outset, it must be acknowledged that this latest Local Development Programme has been characterised by a degree of tension between the need for accountability, effective management and a national policy orientation, as represented by ADM, and the need to develop comprehensive and coherent area development plans at the local level. The guidelines for the implementation of the LDSIP include approximate spending guidelines for the three measures: services for the unemployed, community development and community-based youth initiatives. As a consequence, and as we know from speaking to the Partnerships, the latest round of local area action plans has at times been perceived as a rather artificial exercise, with many key initiatives being 'squeezed' into one of the three measures, generating feelings of unease about the programme as a whole. This unease was particularly evident amongst the rural Partnerships, many of whom felt that the prescribed expenditure shares do not reflect what they perceive as being most appropriate within their local setting. Throughout the consultations for this study, however, it has become apparent that many of the urban Partnerships also feel that significant parts of their work does not easily fall within any of the measures.

ADM clearly has a responsibility with regard to the effective management of the programme and has to assure that the programme is developing in the intended direction. Therefore, a weighting of measures for the LDSIP as a whole seems appropriate. At the same time, the different contexts in which the various Partnerships operate equally seem to demand somewhat greater flexibility in the funding mix at local level. In particular, consideration should be given for the future of the programme to allow some limited proportion of about 10-15 per cent of local funding to be spent for exceptional purposes. This would allow Partnerships and Community Groups to initiate particular innovative actions which do not readily fall within the established dimensions. Obviously, such actions should have a clear focus, should be well-planned and documented, as well as being clearly set out in a special evaluation context. We believe that it is of importance to the programme as a whole that the Partnerships and Community Groups maintain a degree of freedom in identifying key issues at local level and in developing an innovative response to tackling these. After all, this lies at the heart of the concept of democratic experimentalism. Partnerships must continuously renew their search for groups and individuals who have been 'left behind' and excluded from participation in the benefits of social and economic progress, as well as being innovative in their responses to the problems identified. How else, for example, could the PESP Partnerships have drawn attention to target groups beyond the long-term unemployed without the room to listen and look out for other unmet needs?

24 Brian Nolan et al (2002) Monitoring Poverty Trends in Ireland: Results from the 2000 Living in Ireland Survey. Dublin: ESRI. (see Appendix 1)

25 Goodbody Economic Consultants (1999) A Report on the Impact of the OPLURD on Long-Term Unemployment. (see Appendix 2)

3.3.1 Measure A - Services for the Unemployed

Objectives

- To develop targeted services that address long-term unemployment and reach those who excluded from the labour market through specifically focused services, including pro-active outreach to marginalised groups which require intensive support and interventions
- To support individuals in employment and self-employment through education, training, work experience, job placement, enterprise and the social economy
- To support an enterprise culture and the development of community enterprise and the social economy

Achievements during 2001²⁶ and during the first half of 2002²⁷

- Nearly 30,000 (16,000) individuals participated in adult guidance and training measures
- Roughly 12,000 (6,000) individuals participated in education and training programmes, half in certified training courses, of whom just over half (56%) obtained certification
- More than 3,000 (1,700) individuals were supported in self-employment and social economy measures
- Over 2,000 job placements during the first half of 2002

3.3.2 Measure B - Community Development

Objectives

- To enhance the capacity of people living in disadvantaged areas to participate fully in local development opportunities and to counter social exclusion
- To provide support for small-scale improvements to the local environmental and community infrastructure

Achievements during 2001 and during the first half of 2002²⁸

- Nearly 3,000 (1,570) community-based projects received support
- Support was provided to nearly 500 (235) infrastructural projects

3.3.3 Measure C - Community-based Youth Initiatives

Objectives

- To enhance the social and personal development of young people who have left school early or are at risk of early school-leaving, at risk of underachieving at school or who are involved or are at risk of becoming involved in drug misuse, criminal activity and other forms of anti-social behaviour
- To expand the range of community-based education and youth development opportunities available from early years through to early adulthood, in areas of disadvantage
- To alert young people to the dangers of substance abuse and to equip them with the capacity to say no to drugs

Achievements during 2001 and during the first half of 2002

- A total of over 70,000 (21,000) young people were assisted
- Approximately 12,000 (4,000) adults - parents, guardians, carers, etc. - received support

²⁶ ADM (2001) Local Development Social Inclusion Programme - Report from ADM 2001.

²⁷ Figures in brackets are derived from SCOPE and indicate achievements for the first two quarters of 2002. Please note that accurate cumulative figures for the total period cannot be calculated by adding the 2001 and 2002 figures together as a large proportion of individuals are supported from one year to the next.

²⁸ Ibid.

The breakdown of the types of initiatives supported is as follows:

- 18% supporting early childhood/pre-school opportunities
- 36% preventing early school leaving
- 10% addressing the needs of early school leavers
- 21% promoting developmental youth work
- 9% on access to third/higher education
- 6% providing training for trainers

3.3.4 Mid-term Evaluation of the LDSIP

The work of the area-based Partnerships and Community Groups will be evaluated as part of the Mid-term Evaluation of the two Regional Operational Programmes during early 2003. It is clear from the Terms of Reference and the data available from ADM that the Mid-term Evaluation will focus on up-to-date counts of the number of people who have benefited under each of the initiatives, comparing these with the targets that were set at the onset of the LDSIP. It is the opinion of the consultants that without considerable additional research a more detailed impact assessment of the extent to which the social inclusion measures have ameliorated the disadvantage experienced by the target groups and areas will not be possible. The information required for this analysis includes: (i) more comprehensive follow-up information on the medium and long-term positions of individuals participating in the Partnerships' activities; (ii) comprehensive data from a control group with which the 'performance' of programme participants can be compared; and (iii) comprehensive secondary data collected using large-scale surveys or, where available, from the relevant departments²⁹.

On the basis of the data currently available, the only quantitative assessment of the overall impact of the local development programme that will be possible in the foreseeable future, in the consultants' opinion, is a comparative analysis of changes in key socio-economic indicators for the Partnership areas, including changes in their overall deprivation score, following the release of the 2002 Small Area Population Statistics by the CSO. But this will only allow a retrospective evaluation of the impact of the OPLURD, leaving the question of the impact of the LDSIP open until the 2006 Census is completed.

4 Key Issues That Need to be Addressed

Building on the outline of conceptual issues provided in Chapter Two and of the achievements of the Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts in Chapter Three, we will now discuss the issues which must be clarified in the immediate future:

- * commitment to local development organisations
- * clarification of structures
- * the Partnerships' remit
- * the local dimension
- * the proper assessment of impacts
- * learning from the Partnership experience

²⁹ A striking example of the latter is the failure of the Department of Education and Science so far to make available comprehensive early school-leaving data, without which it is impossible to evaluate the impact of existing initiatives.

4.1 An Unequivocal Commitment to Local Development Organisations

In Chapter Two we briefly outlined the historical conjuncture which resulted in the creation of area-based Partnerships in Ireland at the beginning of the 1990s. We highlighted the foresight shown by the Department of the Taoiseach and other key players in this process and drew attention to the significant share of EU funding which helped the programme during its formative years. With respect to the current National Development Plan, the Irish Government has shown considerable commitment to the area-based Partnerships by compensating for reductions in EU funding for social inclusion measures.

However, despite this commitment at programme level, there remains a feeling of uncertainty amongst the Partnerships and Community Groups about their future. The reason for this is that the Partnerships continuously receive mixed messages. On the one hand, the Irish Government prides itself on the achievements of the Partnerships with regard to the hundreds of thousands of disadvantaged individuals who have benefited from local initiatives. On the other hand, however, state institutions seem to be reluctant to actually learn from this experience. This ambiguity is also visible at the institutional level: on the one hand, the language of partnership has been incorporated into the various institutional layers of the State - e.g. CDBs, Local Authorities etc. - whilst the organisations which have been at the forefront of developing the partnership approach are often either dismissed or viewed as competitors by these organisations.

Before discussing the main issues underlying this ambiguity - such as the lack of clarification of each organisation's role within local development structures - it is important to emphasise that this uncertainty is highly detrimental to the local development process. A first step towards overcoming it would be an unequivocal statement of State support for the area-based Partnership organisations.

During the Mid-term Evaluation of the OPLURD, the External Evaluators found some evidence of reluctance amongst senior representatives of the Local Authorities to acknowledge what might be learned from the area-based Partnerships and the partnership process in general. Attitudes are likely to have changed somewhat over the intervening period³⁰, and some substantive progress has been made over the past five years: new local development structures have emerged at county and regional level, notably the County Development Boards and an explicit local development and social inclusion remit at regional level. The Partnerships, Community Groups and other local development organisations now have an explicit role within the CDBs, the CDBs have appointed Directors of Community and Enterprise and some Local Authorities have a dedicated social inclusion unit. These are all steps in the right direction, but only time will tell whether these developments herald a radical break in terms of the dominant culture of these organisations in relation to social inclusion and local participation. Local Authorities in Ireland tend to view themselves as being first and foremost responsible for the physical infrastructure of their respective areas. A fundamental change in orientation towards a more people-oriented way of operating is likely to take longer than just five years to develop³¹.

When we look at the emergence of systems of 'democratic experimentalism' in the sphere of public administration, it is evident that the very autonomy of local development structures has increased the directive capacity of government. These local structures cannot and should not be subsumed into the institutions of the State itself, as state institutions themselves are not the most appropriate means for enhancing the institutional responsiveness of the State to local needs. The need for semi-autonomous local development organisations should therefore be acknowledged by all key stakeholders at national level, eliminating ongoing uncertainties about their future. At the same time, it will be the onus of these organisations to actually provide evidence that they have an impact on local development.

³⁰ Unfortunately, it was not possible to include consultations of local authorities as part of the present study. This, however, would be an important element in the forthcoming evaluation of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems.

³¹ The Combat Poverty Agency is currently undertaking a study on the Local Authority Learning Network, which will address some of these questions. Unfortunately, the results of the study were not available to the consultants at the time of writing.

4.2 The Local Development and Social Inclusion Structures

We argued in the previous section that there is a need for semi-autonomous local development organisations, without indicating the precise form that these should assume. In fact, a wide variety of such organisations may be observed, ranging from Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts (all supported by ADM) to the IDA, Forfás and /darás na Gaeltachta, LEADER groups, groups supported under the Community Development Programme, childcare initiatives and many more. Yet another layer has been created by the new social inclusion measures aimed at the existing institutions of local government, namely RAPID and CLÁR. It is now apparent that the extension of the partnership approach beyond the national level has resulted in a proliferation of organisations and institutions. But each of these institutions must be inclusive - i.e. allow for adequate representation of community interests - whilst simultaneously embodying a sufficient level of directive capacity by the State's institutions and the social partners. The pressures which this has put on the latter has recently led to calls for a halt to the proliferation of local development agencies, particularly amongst some of the State's institutions.

It will be clear that the identification of an 'optimal level' of local representation is not a straightforward matter. Because of the small size of the country and other historical reasons, Ireland has one of the most centrally-run public administrations of any European country. For this reason, the level of experience of civil servants at local level and their directive capacities have historically been rather low. FÁS provides an excellent example in this respect. FÁS has changed within less than two decades from being a nationally-run training agency with little understanding of local needs to being a highly-diversified organisation with considerable interaction at the local level. The 'optimal level' at which Partnership organisations can operate may also change over time and is likely to be influenced by the degree of administrative devolution of state institutions.

The situation within which the area-based Partnerships currently operate is characterised by the development of new administrative structures, namely the County Development Boards and, above all, the Social Inclusion Measures Groups. Whilst signalling a potential for the realisation of a partnership approach at county level, the experience within these institutions to date differs greatly from county to county and raises a number of issues that require clarification.

4.2.1 County and City Development Boards (CDBs)

The CDBs constitute first and foremost a planning body. Their key tasks are to develop coherent multi-annual plans for the development of their city/county as a whole. They bring together the key stakeholders that are typically represented in the partnership process and provide an institutional framework for collectively identifying the needs of people living in the city/county and developing appropriate strategies in response to these needs. The CDBs have a further role in monitoring the implementation of these strategies and in revising targets at regular intervals. The CDBs thus provide an important interface between local government, state agencies and the social partners, including the community sector.

The composition of the CDBs is largely determined by the formula provided in the Guidelines of the Interdepartmental Taskforce, and is similar across all CDBs. Despite this similarity in composition, however, the actual experiences of the Partnerships in working with CDBs varies greatly from county to county. In some counties, the Partnerships and Community Groups are given a key role in the various working groups and their breadth of experience in developing social inclusion measures is readily accepted and utilised. In other counties, however, the Partnerships' working experience in the CDBs is much more negative, with representatives feeling that their experience in the field of social inclusion is undervalued.

The role of the Partnerships and Community Groups within the CDBs seems to be dependent upon two factors: firstly, a subjective factor relating to key personnel within the local authorities, state agencies, as well as the Partnerships and Community

Groups themselves and, secondly, an objective factor relating to the relative strength and maturity of the respective Partnerships themselves. We believe that neither of these factors should be allowed to distract from the key role of the Partnerships and Community Groups in highlighting the importance of social exclusion and cumulative disadvantage. The CDBs were instituted on the basis of a broadly-shared view that local government and the delivery of state services at local level were in need of reform, particularly in relation to social inclusion. We do not wish to suggest that 'Partnerships always know best' or that the local authorities and state agencies should 'learn from the Partnerships' in a one-way fashion. However, the Partnerships and Community Groups have a special commitment to social inclusion and an unmatched experience in developing new and innovative responses to mitigating the effects of social disadvantage. In addition, they have a degree of freedom in identifying new areas where gaps may exist in service provision as well as locating potential target groups that are excluded from the advantages that most other people take for granted.

It is precisely because the Partnerships are not involved in the large-scale delivery of services such as education, social welfare and housing, unlike mainstream Government departments, that they can concentrate on developing responses at precisely those points where a focus on social inclusion is lacking. Furthermore, unlike the highly-structured Government departments, Partnerships have been at the forefront in developing inter-sectoral and multifaceted responses at local level in order to overcome the innate tendency of Government departments and state agencies to act on a purely sectoral basis. Finally, unlike civil servants, who have to oversee the effective delivery of vast public programmes to the population as a whole, the motivation of staff working within the Partnerships derives primarily from their commitment to their locality and to the socially excluded within it. For these reasons, Partnerships can make a contribution to the CDBs which differs from that of the other institutions.

As outlined earlier, the pressure to extend social partnership to the local level derives mainly from the State's need to enhance its overall directive capacity. It is therefore in the interest of the local authorities and state agencies to ensure that they build on the experiences of the Partnerships, or at least those experiences that have demonstrable effectiveness. Conversely, the development of competitive tensions and rivalries between Partnerships and local authorities is misplaced and destructive.

It must be acknowledged, at this stage, that significant progress has been made in recent years in encouraging local actors to adopt a partnership approach. Some of the City and County Authorities have set up designated Social Inclusion Units and the practice of convening key stakeholders in order to develop area action plans with regard to a wide range of issues pays tribute to an approach pioneered by the Partnerships. Indeed, some stakeholders seem to feel that these developments have now rendered the existence of semi-independent local development organisations redundant.

We believe this to be short-sighted: the implication is that once a given agency or department has adopted a partnership model in its mode of operation, the agency once again 'knows best'. But it is precisely because of their relative autonomy and their specific focus that Partnerships are able to make a unique contribution. This, however, also means that it is of the utmost importance that they maintain this autonomy and do not to stifle the Partnerships by overburdening them with the purely administrative task of delivering large-scale social inclusion programmes.

4.2.2 Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Groups

The principal role of the SIM Groups is to advance the overall progress of the CDBs in planning and implementing adequate social inclusion measures in all aspects of the work of the social partners represented on the CDB. Obviously, the SIM Groups represent a natural arena for Partnerships to exert an influence, and in a significant number of CDBs the SIM Groups are chaired by a representative of the Partnership(s).

However, the exact role of the SIM Groups is only gradually emerging and far from being established at this point in time. Recent guidelines issued by the Task Force³² for the working of the SIM Groups raise as many questions as they seek to answer.

³² Guidelines on the Co-ordination of Social Inclusion Measures at Local Level by CDB Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Working Groups (December 2001).

While highlighting the key purpose of co-ordinating activities with a social inclusion dimension, it remains unclear what remit the SIM Groups have with respect to the Departments and agencies that are represented on them. Further more, there is no indication of whether the SIM Groups will have any resources at their disposal. Exacerbated by the fact that the SIM Groups are already facing a departmental evaluation before they have effectively started to operate, there exists a feeling amongst key representatives of the SIM Groups that expectations as to what they might be able to achieve are vastly inflated.

We believe, that the SIM Groups have the potential to play an important future role. The path, however, by which to gradually grow into this role needs to be carefully mapped out.

Firstly, SIM Groups should not get involved in any element of service delivery as this would only further exacerbate the proliferation of services providers in the local development landscape.

Secondly, the key function of co-ordination needs to be better clarified with respect to its four underlying components: (i) the collection and interpretation of relevant social inclusion data at county-level, (ii) a process by which priorities on social inclusion activities are being agreed upon amongst the key stakeholders, (iii) the actual process of coordinating a limited number of activities (along the priorities collectively identified) across various departments and state agencies, and (iv) the subsequent evaluation of the effectiveness of the activities engaged in.

Taken together, the four steps of co-ordination constitute an ongoing cycle. Any attempt to reduce the process of co-ordination to only a sub-set of the four tasks will render the process useless in the longer run. Co-ordination, without first collecting data, making sense of it, agreeing on a shared understanding of what the data tells us and an agreement on where largest gains can be made from the co-ordination of efforts is meaningless. At the same time, without a commitment to evaluating the outcomes at a later stage, co-ordination is an end in itself rather than a means towards achieving greater effectiveness.

Throughout this report, we have highlighted the shortcomings in the evaluation of the Partnerships' innovative work and notably the lack of involvement of key departments in this process. In our view, the SIM Groups have a real potential in bringing to life a stronger emphasis on evaluation and mainstreaming, which is shared by the various participating agencies and, depending on the particular activity, in each case supported and underwritten by a lead department.

Because Partnerships are already in the business where they permanently monitor and respond to the cumulative effects of all planned and unplanned developments at local level, we believe that the Partnerships have accumulated considerable experience in this area and that they have a key role to play within the SIM Groups. This implies that not only the SIM Groups, but also the Partnerships themselves need to be sufficiently resourced in order to fulfil this role.

4.2.3 RAPID, CLÁR³³

RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) and CLÁR (Ceantair Laga Árd Riachtanais) are the latest two area-based programmes designed by the Government to address multiple deprivation in disadvantaged communities. Strand I of RAPID targets support and investment at the 25 most deprived urban areas in the State, whilst Strand II targets 20 provincial towns in a similar fashion. The designation is mainly based on the Index of Relative Affluence and Deprivation utilised in the designation of Partnership and Community Group areas, but also draws on information on rented local authority housing and designated disadvantaged schools. The identification of rural areas to be targeted under CLÁR uses a single criterion, the level of population loss since the foundation of the State, a variable that is central to the 'rural' dimension of the Haase Index that was used in the delineation of rural Partnership areas.

³³ It should be noted that the comments made in this section in relation to RAPID and CLÁR are largely, although not exclusively, based on observations and comments made by Partnership representatives and not on a comprehensive evaluation of the two programmes in their own right.

From the outset, therefore, RAPID and CLÁR are targeted towards the most deprived locations within existing Partnership areas and this gives them the potential to reinforce the work of the Partnerships with respect to these communities. Whilst it was widely anticipated in the run-up to these programmes that RAPID would be implemented through the existing Partnership structures, the Government nevertheless opted to implement both RAPID and CLÁR through the CDBs and, notably, the Local Authorities. This, unfortunately, has led to frictions between Partnerships and Local Authorities, who frequently perceive each other as competing for scarce resources.

In our view, the emergence of a competitive relationship between Partnerships and Local Authorities is most unfortunate, but was somewhat inevitable in light of the lack of conceptual clarity about the principal role of area-based initiatives within local development. The specific objectives which inform both RAPID and CLÁR are to prioritise new and improved services and infrastructure in disadvantaged areas in a coherent, targeted and accelerated way, focusing particularly on a more co-ordinated approach by Government Departments and statutory agencies. Such objectives are entirely complementary with the objectives and work of the Partnerships and Community Groups. Therefore, the question of whether the RAPID and CLÁR budgets should have been allocated to the Partnerships is irrelevant. However, based on the evidence provided by the Partnerships, many Local Authorities seem to have attempted to deliver the programme in isolation from them, and their achievements to date are perceived as disappointing by the Partnerships. Rather than pursuing a single area-based approach in partnership with local communities and the Partnership companies which are already working closely with them, RAPID and CLÁR continue to operate in isolation, generally failing to avail of the knowledge and experience of the existing area-based Partnerships.

There is a real danger of fostering an atmosphere in which the Local Authorities are encouraged to believe that sooner or later their efforts will render the Partnerships redundant. As we have shown throughout this report, this belief is misplaced; not because, as some would argue, the local authorities have shown themselves to be incapable of delivering a social inclusion programme, but because the *raison d'être* of the Partnerships lies with the unique contribution that they can make at the area level to local development and social inclusion, as outlined in detail in the previous section. It remains the responsibility of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to clarify these roles and to avoid the emergence of rivalries in the future.

4.2.4 LEADER

The LEADER programme came into existence at roughly the same time as the first local development initiatives under the PESP. At national level, it is of comparable size to the local development programmes, but, within rural areas, it is the largest area-based programme. LEADER originated from the need to facilitate the transition from a largely agricultural to a largely non-agricultural workforce in rural areas, and focuses on supporting enterprise. Historically, it has therefore had a primarily sectoral orientation rather than a social inclusion approach. However, as agricultural supports are gradually scaled down at the European level in view of the impending enlargement of the EU, there is the need for LEADER to develop a stronger social inclusion dimension. In the Irish context, the movement of LEADER from the Department of Agriculture and Food to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs marks a decisive turning-point in Government attempts to bring the various local development programmes under one department. We believe that this move has considerable potential for the future of area-based initiatives aimed at alleviating social exclusion.

In some areas, area-based Partnerships and LEADER groups already operate under a single umbrella organisation. Judging by the experience of these Partnerships, this has been greatly beneficial in terms of avoiding a duplication of efforts and providing a simple one-stop-shop for those in need of support at local level. Given that the programmes now fall within the remit of a single department, it may be argued that greater efforts should be made to explore the potential for joint delivery of these two programmes in areas where this does not currently take place.

Specifying the precise form which a closer co-operation between LEADER and Partnerships or Community Groups should take lies beyond the scope of this study, and we will therefore confine ourselves to a few general remarks. Whilst under the LDSIP, enterprise support is largely confined to supporting the long-term unemployed, previous local development programmes, particularly the OPLURD, contained a considerably larger element of enterprise support. And, as we will discuss in greater detail in Section 4.4.1, particularly the rural Partnerships are putting forward strong arguments for re-establishing a stronger enterprise dimension within the local development programme, as they see little purpose in training individuals if there are no jobs available within a reasonable distance. It is clear, however, that a closer co-operation or even integration of the two programmes can only take place within the overall framework and philosophy of area-based initiatives as described in this paper; i.e. any activities need to be integrated into a coherent development plan for the area as a whole. Thus, the overriding aim of the plan must remain that of promoting social inclusion, and its operating principles must be based on partnership, innovative actions and evaluation, with a view to influencing the wider policy agenda.

4.2.5 Partnerships in every County?

In Section 4.2.2 we argued that the Partnerships and Community Groups have a natural role to play within the CDBs, and particularly within the SIM Groups, which one could describe as a 'watchdog' for the effect on social inclusion of the activities of each of the State's institutions throughout the county. However, the question arises of what structures are necessary in order to fulfil such role effectively. Involvement in these structures clearly requires a minimum permanent administrative apparatus and sufficient resources to enable key personnel to take on the tasks that this involves, particularly with regard to the development of policies at regional, if not national level.

In most counties where there is at least one Partnership, we believe that the essential structures are already in place, although greater resources may be required as the Partnerships' role within the SIM Groups expands. Questions arise, however, in relation to counties with no area-based Partnership Companies and those where disadvantaged groups and communities are not currently represented by an ADM-supported Community Group.

The fact that we are raising this question does not imply criticism of the current contribution made by Community Groups to their respective areas and to the CDBs. The National Network of the Community Strand does already provide the Community Groups with an effective voice at national level. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the growing role of the Partnerships and Community Groups within the SIM Groups may require stronger organisational structures at the county level.

Arguments have been raised during our consultations against the idea of setting up a Partnership in counties that do not currently have one, with Community Groups highlighting their more 'organic' relationship with and greater sensitivity to the communities they represent as well as their 'less bureaucratic' approach vis-à-vis the Partnerships. They clearly feel that if they were to operate as part of a county-wide Partnership structure, the communities that they care most about may not fare so well. To this we might add that the full variety of local development experiences are an asset to the project of 'democratic experimentalism', and it may in fact be undesirable to pursue a uniform structure in all contexts.

When we evaluate the arguments that have been advanced against the setting up of a Partnership (or Partnerships) in the remaining counties, however, we believe that some of these are not specific to Community Groups alone, but are also more general in nature. The question of whether a local development structure emerges 'organically', for example, also applies to the Partnership companies, some of which have a tradition in their areas which precedes the PESP, whilst others became only operational half-way through the OPLURD, using objective measures of relative deprivation. The main priority should therefore be to build upon and to harness community links wherever they exist. Equally, the need to remain in touch with the most disadvantaged communities and to avoid bureaucratisation applies to all Partnerships.

The authors of this report believe that, partly on foot of the Partnerships' and Community Groups' own successes, a proliferation of local development organisations has indeed occurred. This proliferation is not due to the decisions of the Partnerships and Community Groups, but is primarily the result of the frequently ad hoc and pragmatic way in which the Government has responded to newly-emerging concerns. Nevertheless, the argument for more rational forms of organisation of the local development landscape now has considerable merits. To defend all existing structures merely out of a fear of change would be unreasonable and would provide no solution to the objective difficulties that the state apparatus faces in meeting highly-segmented community interests.

Whatever structures arise, they must take heed of the conceptual underpinnings for area-based local development structures outlined in this paper. They must be focused on a specific area, respond to local needs, relate to forms of cumulative deprivation, have social inclusion as their central tenet, be based on a partnership approach, enjoy a degree of freedom to maximise their ability to develop innovative responses to the problems identified and be committed to monitoring and evaluation as a means of influencing the wider policy agenda with regard to social inclusion. Finally, they must be well-resourced and secure of their future status in order to carry out their responsibilities both within their respective localities and in the county, regional and national policy arenas. If all of these conditions are met, then the question of organisational structures is of secondary importance.

4.3 The Partnerships' Remit

Building on the conceptual overview of area-based initiatives provided in Chapter Two, this section deals with the key issues that we believe to be central to the work of the Partnerships. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive list of things that the Partnerships should do, but rather to focus attention on tasks that follow logically from the context and role of the Partnerships and which are likely to be essential to their strategic outlook in the future.

The first guiding principle of the Partnerships is that they seek to respond to local needs. People working with the Partnerships are motivated primarily by a commitment to their locality and to the people who reside within it. This sets them apart from Government departments and state agencies which are, without exception, organised along sectoral lines.

Secondly, Partnerships provide a voice for the disadvantaged at local level. Because of their exclusive focus on improving the living conditions of disadvantaged communities and their inherent commitment to practicing partnership at local level, they have earned a trust which Government departments and state agencies are unlikely ever to achieve. Their critical ability to adjust their focus and to orient their activities towards those who are most disadvantaged accords them a unique role in the local development landscape. Because of the Partnerships' ability to identify unmet needs and their commitment to seeking new ways of meeting these, the focus of their activity should be piloting and innovation.

The primary focus of the Partnerships' work as a whole must therefore be strategic and policy-oriented. Multiple and deeply-rooted deprivation at a spatial level is the outcome of the uneven processes of economic, social, cultural and political development. Almost by definition, therefore, disadvantaged communities are unable to lift themselves out of their predicament using their own resources. Furthermore, given that local development programmes represent only a small proportion of overall Government spending, any expectation that Partnerships can lift deprived communities out of their disadvantaged situation by providing services at local level is equally misjudged. To overcome the deep-rooted forms of deprivation that beset such communities, the underlying processes which produce uneven outcomes must be altered, and these processes should be the primary focus of the collective body of Partnerships, Community Groups and Employment Pacts.

Over the course of successive local development programmes, the range of initiatives implemented by the Partnerships has increased greatly. In part, this reflects the ability of the Partnerships to conceptualise, plan and implement new initiatives targeted at the most disadvantaged groups and communities, as well as their capacity to account for their expenditure and to monitor the achievement of their targets. Partnerships frequently seek funding from a range of different sources in order to finance their activities, and Government departments see the Partnerships as a convenient way of implementing new initiatives.

Whilst on the one hand this represents a de facto acknowledgement of the organisational capacity of the Partnerships, it also entails certain risks for the Partnerships, above all because they may be pushed towards the role of 'ambulance service'. If the implementation of large-scale initiatives puts undue pressure on the administrative resources of a Partnership and takes away from its focus on piloting, innovating and influencing the policy-making arena, the long-term effect of this involvement is likely to be detrimental to the core role of the Partnerships as we see it. Indeed, it is our contention that the LDSIP, in particular, already represents a shift in this direction. In our view, the current programme places an excessive emphasis on throughputs at the expense of piloting and innovation, and particularly the systematic assessment of the relative merits of different approaches to tackling deprivation. Furthermore, the involvement of the Partnerships and Community Groups in a growing number of actions which no longer have any significant element of learning attached to them, seems to be at least at times in conflict with the time, energy and resources committed towards the widening of influence within the planning and policy-making arenas.

Most organisations have a tendency to develop elements of bureaucratisation as they grow and mature. Partnerships are not immune to this trend and their enhanced role at county level, notably through their involvement in the CDBs and SIM Groups, as well as their membership of a growing number of national policy-making committees, necessitate a degree of professionalism and managerial capacity which mean that key staff must be one step removed from day-to-day work with disadvantaged communities. We believe that the Partnerships should not be afraid to admit the existence of this tendency, but should seek to confront the challenge that it represents as far as their main goals are concerned.

Finally, we have to look at how the individual area-based Partnerships and Community Groups relate to the programme as a whole and to ADM as its implementing agency. It appears that the relationship between the Partnerships and ADM has, at times, reinforced the trend towards bureaucratisation. For example, many Partnerships feel that an overemphasis on numerical reporting systems has developed within ADM in recent years, accompanied by a lack of appreciation of policy-related activities. On the other hand, ADM points towards its responsibility for the overall orientation of the programme, its accountability with regard to finance and agreed targets and the need to effectively manage the diverse programme elements.

As highlighted throughout this paper, the consultants believe that one of the key aspects of the Partnerships' contribution to the local development process as a whole derives from their ability to respond to local conditions and to take into account the views of local stakeholders. Excessive rationalisation of activities at local level is therefore contrary to the overall purpose of area-based Partnerships, as long as the intended overall mix is achieved at the programme level. At the same time, the Partnerships have to learn that simply engaging in the activities collectively identified at local level does not suffice. Unless the majority of these actions are conceptualised and designed in such a way that they contribute to a broader evaluation, research and policy agenda, there is little sense in pursuing these activities. Without doubt, and as we will discuss in greater detail below, this will mean more rather than less evaluation. But evaluation must be focused on the impacts on individuals, groups and areas, rather than assessing Partnerships on the basis of throughputs only.

4.4 Acknowledging the Local Dimension

Diversity in the Partnerships' responses to local needs is an essential aspect of the overall local development programme and the concept of 'democratic experimentalism'. However, the desire to generalise models of good practice across all Partnerships has meant that successive local development programmes have become increasingly prescriptive. The three measures under the LDSIP largely define a set of actions which are intended to fit all circumstances. This is unrealistic and, indeed, undesirable. Partnerships vary greatly in terms of the context in which they operate and for this reason they must have sufficient autonomy in order to respond in an appropriate way to the needs that they identify at local level. The whole process of partnership is central to this and provides the means by which needs are identified collectively, prioritised and tackled via a strategic approach that is agreed upon and then published in the form of a local area development plan. An overly prescriptive approach to local development inevitably fails to take account of the genuine differences that exist at local level, as well as undermining the partnership process itself. In other words, whilst adhering to a coordinated approach to the definition of questions to be addressed and a common framework for assessing the impact of varying approaches, the approaches themselves should be allowed to vary in accordance with the contextual setting. In the following sub-sections we will highlight some of the key differences in context which we believe to be of central importance and which should be reflected in different local area action plans.

4.4.1 Urban / Rural Differences

The deprivation experienced by disadvantaged urban and rural areas differs in some important aspects and needs to be conceptualised accordingly:

- (i) Deprived rural areas are sparsely populated, whilst deprived urban areas are typically of high population density.
- (ii) Deprived rural areas are characterised by an absence of alternative job opportunities against the backdrop of an uninterrupted decline in the relative importance of farming activities; deprived urban areas are typically located either in the inner city or on the urban periphery, thus at least in theory allowing access to a wider (urban-based) labour market.
- (iii) If alternative employment opportunities exist in rural areas, these are generally available in the nearest large town, requiring an extensive transport infrastructure, which often does not exist; public transport infrastructure generally exists from deprived urban areas located at the periphery to the respective town centre, but is equally non-existent when attempting to travel from one point of the periphery to another, which might be the locus of available jobs (e.g. industrial estates on the periphery).
- (iv) Deprived urban areas are typically locations of high unemployment and particularly long-term unemployment. In contrast, deprived rural areas generally have lower-than-average levels of unemployment, as these are often artificially suppressed by sustained emigration.
- (v) As a consequence of sustained emigration, deprived rural areas suffer from:
 - a thinning-out of their core working-age population;
 - high age dependency ratios involving young children and elderly people;
 - high economic dependency ratios;
 - lower-than-average educational attainments amongst the adult population;
 - an absence of the most active economic, social, cultural and political actors;
 - decreased attractiveness for inward investment.
- (vi) Deprived rural areas suffer from extensive on-farm underemployment which is not captured by the ILO or CSO unemployment measures.

- (vii) Deprived rural areas suffer from a continual cycle of decline in services and an economic, cultural and political marginalisation due to the interaction of labour market deprivation and population loss; deprived urban areas in contrast, particularly those built relatively recently on the urban periphery, frequently are lacking any infrastructure at all and also are suffering a 'labelling' effect as they have become renowned for their social problems.
- (viii) Deprivation in urban areas is highest in large-scale public housing estates. Although there are concentrations of poor people in public housing estates on the outskirts of small villages and towns, poor people and disadvantaged groups are typically scattered throughout the wider hinterland.
- (ix) Poorer individuals living in rural areas form part of a more heterogeneous 'community', with the result that stigmatisation and labeling effects are of particular concern.

Rural Partnerships therefore operate in a radically different environment to their urban counterparts:

- (i) Whereas for urban Partnerships the overwhelming issue involves education and access to a pre-existing labour market, supply-side initiatives in a rural setting become meaningless if no jobs are available within a reasonable distance.
- (ii) One of the most important steps in overcoming deprivation in rural areas relates to accessibility. Any service that might reasonably be provided in a small deprived urban area (e.g. a community centre, crèche, cultural project etc.) faces the additional problem of physical accessibility.
- (iii) Social stigma must be recognised as an important aspect when planning interventions. Urban areas are often spatially-segregated along social class divisions, particularly at the extremes of the socio-economic spectrum. In contrast, rural communities are more heterogeneous, with the result that poorer and more affluent people often reside within the same locality, which has a number of important consequences in terms of social inclusion.
- (iv) As in deprived urban areas, unemployment is a major problem in deprived rural areas. However, whilst in urban areas there is an overwhelming need for full-time and well-paid employment, rural areas have a comparatively greater need for part-time and seasonal employment that provides additional income in the context of a multi-jobbing environment.
- (v) A significant component of deprivation in rural areas is mediated by contingent factors, and people in need of individual support are further marginalised due to the difficulty of accessing services. As post offices, primary and secondary schools, Garda stations, banks, doctors and medical care and childcare facilities are thinly-scattered in rural areas and often under threat of closure, population decline is in itself a cause of deprivation.

4.4.2 Older / Recently-established Partnerships

The second major difference that must be acknowledged is between the older and the newer Partnerships. One of the most important findings of the first evaluation of the PESP Partnerships highlighted the need to build up partnership structures that enable community representatives to have a full and meaningful participation. It was believed to be particularly important that Partnerships should not prematurely become involved in the management of large-scale resources, as this would detract from their ability to build up trust during the formative stages.

The Global Grant period saw the identification of the most disadvantaged areas throughout Ireland on an objective basis. This represented a decisive step away from the previous situation, in which the Government responded to the most vocal interest groups. However, the new approach entailed the construction of partnership structures where community representation had not emerged spontaneously. This should not be seen as a drawback, as it was explicitly postulated at the beginning of this process that the most disadvantaged communities may not even have a voice to represent them.

The OPLURD thus led to the formal establishment of the remaining Partnership companies, many of which did not become fully operational until half way through the programme.

We must therefore make two distinctions: between the original PESP Partnerships and the more recently established ones, and secondly, between Partnerships (and particularly Community Groups) which grew organically from an existing community development infrastructure and those which had to assist the emergence of such an infrastructure. Whilst there is a certain overlap between these two distinctions, they are nevertheless conceptually different, and a number of the later-established Partnerships have been able to build upon strong forms of existing community representation. Conversely, at least some of those Partnerships which, at the time of their formation, could not rely on existing community structures have nevertheless been very successful in overcoming this deficit.

The reason we highlight these issues is that there appears to be a difference in the general outlook of many Partnerships which relates back to their particular historical development. Those Partnerships which have been in existence for a large number of successive local development programmes and/or which emerged in the context of strong prevailing community activities tend to have a more self-confident outlook. These Partnerships have witnessed the change in emphasis within local development over the course of the various programmes, and largely view these as a means to achieve what they have collectively identified as the key issues at local level. In contrast, those Partnerships which were set up in later years and possibly without pre-existing community representation, tend to view themselves as being more strongly circumscribed by the literal wording of the current LDSIP.

This study takes a long-term view of the progress that has been made in extending partnership to the local level. We thus see the question of how well successive local development programmes have fostered this process as potentially more important than the question of how well Partnerships have performed under any particular programme. This is important in the context of the impending Mid-term Evaluation of the LDSIP, as this will necessarily be more strongly focused on the latter aspect.

In the longer run, we believe that some of the differences between Partnerships are likely to disappear and we feel that the area-based Partnerships and Community Groups make a valuable contribution to local development. However, as the Partnerships derive neither their origins nor their *raison d'être* from an electoral process³⁴ but the objective identification as one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country, they must 'earn' their respect by meticulously demonstrating how their existence makes a difference in terms of outcomes to those individuals and areas which are thus described.

4.4.3 The Trade-off between Variability and Structure

In the previous sub-sections we argued that there is a need to allow for differences in the *modus operandi* of the various area-based initiatives, whilst nevertheless pursuing a unified approach to evaluation and research. Indeed, as we argued earlier, the success of the programme as a whole depends on variations in the approach of the Partnerships, as this facilitates a comparative analysis of the relative effectiveness of different strategies within specific contexts and ultimately provides the basis for Sabel's concept of 'democratic experimentalism'.

However, the actions undertaken at local level are not an end in themselves. Instead, actions need to be designed in such a way that they address the following question: 'what is the impact on a specific target group or area if we address their needs in this way rather than that way?'. Furthermore, Partnerships need to develop the capacity to actually answer these questions, as they are considerably different to those posed by most of the current project evaluations.

Moreover, in order to be effective, local development structures must interact with the existing institutional configuration of national and local government. The difficulties

³⁴ Partnerships have now elected representatives on their boards. However, as a whole, Partnerships do not constitute an electorally-based structure, but an essentially administrative response to the objective identification of need.

faced by a highly centralised apparatus in seeking to deal with local concerns are considerable, and the Partnership approach may only be adopted by these institutions at local level in a gradual fashion. It is therefore essential for the Partnerships to continue to deliver effective representation, whatever the prevailing institutional environment. At this point in time, this means concentrating on the CDBs, on the institutionalisation of the role of the Partnerships within the SIM Groups and stronger representation in key policy-making committees at national level. If there is to be some element of rationalisation within local development structures, particularly in those counties where there are currently no area-based Partnerships, we believe that this must be based on extensive consultation and, in doing so, should take as its point of departure the key conceptual elements underlying the rationale for area-based initiatives.

4.5 Correct Assessment of Impacts

As argued earlier, the fact that area-based partnerships are not exclusively based upon an electoral process does not constitute an intractable problem. This is because the *raison d'être* for the existence of semi-autonomous local development organisations lies with the underlying need to find new ways of addressing local problems. However, as we stated earlier, this also suggests that these 'semi-autonomous' organisations have an obligation to show that their actions make a difference to the groups and areas targeted.

We believe this to be the single greatest weakness in the current work of the Partnerships and Community Groups, and feel that it contributes to the failure of Government departments and state agencies to learn from their experience. Whilst the Partnerships and ADM have gone to great lengths to count the number of individuals and groups assisted under the various measures of the local development programmes, after more than a decade we know extremely little about the actual impact that this has had on the communities and areas concerned.

We will illustrate this issue by way of an example. There is probably not a single Partnership in the country which is not involved in a number of initiatives which address the problem of early school-leaving. This may involve interactions with the students' families, homework clubs, special tuition within the school or the use of additional resources within the existing class room environment. Nevertheless, apart from individual accounts, we do not know what contribution each of these types of interventions makes to the educational achievement of the students in question, and to their risk of leaving school prematurely.

The reasons for this shortcoming are several:

1. There is a tendency for those working on the ground to be so overwhelmed by the exceptional needs that they are attempting to address that all their efforts are dedicated to 'helping the student' rather than the systematic pursuit of a research question.
2. Initiatives are generally set up in response to the identification of particular needs in the process of extensive consultation and the collective identification of key strategies at local level. This, however, means that very few initiatives - if any - are set up with a 'research design' in mind. There is no process by which Partnerships can first collectively identify areas of common interest, and then develop a national comparative research design in order to assess the impact of their different approaches to tackling these common problems.
3. Successive local development programmes have not given sufficient weight to impact evaluation. On the contrary, there is clear evidence that the programmes have become successively more output-oriented, rather than being concerned with the impact of interventions with targeted individuals and groups. Indeed, as a gradual shift has occurred away from concern with the effects of long-term unemployment, towards a concern with social exclusion, it is possible to argue that interactions with individuals from particular target groups could become an end in themselves. There is a temptation to believe that by virtue of that interaction, one is addressing the problem of social exclusion, even if this does not result in any substantive change in the actual situation of those concerned.

4. The shortcomings with regard to an appropriate evaluation framework which focuses on impacts is further hampered in Ireland by the refusal of the Department of Education and Science and the Teachers Unions to support studies which assess the school level, and thus socially-determined influences on the educational achievement of students.
5. Impact evaluation is a complex issue and requires significant resources and scientific experience if it is to be taken seriously. These resources would need to be earmarked at the planning stages of the overall programme and obviously compete with the amount of resources available for other purposes, including implementation.
6. Impact evaluation requires the commitment and support of the relevant Government departments and state agencies. In the present example of initiatives which attempt to address the problem of early school-leaving, the failure of the Department to facilitate an impact evaluation could not be more striking. There has been a persistent failure by the Department of Education and Science to release comprehensive school-level figures on early school-leaving and scholastic achievement, effectively rendering any impact assessment impossible. As a consequence, it is necessary to inquire about the purposes of these initiatives: there is no longer any innovation, all possible approaches have been documented many times and we still have no way of assessing their relative merits.

In the previous example, we concentrated on the issue of early school-leaving, although a similar argument can be made in relation to all major initiatives implemented through the Partnerships. Moreover, it is necessary to demonstrate that the mere presence of a Partnership makes a measurable difference to the most disadvantaged communities. Reaching out to people in need (as documented by throughput or result figures) does not suffice, and it is necessary to develop objective measures that can facilitate an evaluation of the Partnerships' work. After all, how can the Partnerships fulfil their role as 'social inclusion watchdog' within the SIM Groups, if they cannot demonstrate an ability to assess the impact of different approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion?

There is a need for greater awareness that the adoption of a Partnership approach alone does not necessarily result in any substantive improvements in the situation of disadvantaged communities and areas. For the past ten years, Partnerships have become accustomed to working in an environment where the interaction with disadvantaged people and groups is taken as being synonymous with achieving an improvement in their situation; indeed, successive local development programmes themselves have equated the reaching of specific throughput targets with the reduction of deprivation.

Once the Partnerships start looking at each and every Government department and state agency in terms of whether changes in their practices can lead to greater social inclusion, this assumption is no longer sustainable and harder proof is required. So far, however, the Partnerships and ADM have been slow to develop a capacity to undertake serious impact assessments even with regard to their own actions. If, on the other hand, the Partnerships take the view that impact assessment is not central to their work and that all of their energies should be dedicated to implementation, one has to ask what makes the Partnerships so special that only they can fulfil this role?

4.6 Learning from the Partnership Experience

In 1996, the OECD stated in its report on local Partnerships in Ireland:

"The partnerships that we have seen are extraordinarily innovative, but they have been better at creating new things than building stable institutions that embody and extend their innovations. In part, this is because the Irish state has been better at allowing innovation than at learning from its protagonists about how to generalise local successes and incorporate changes they suggest into the organisation of the functional administration"³⁵.

35 Charles Sabel (1996) Ireland - Local Partnerships and Social Innovation, OECD, p.85.

The external evaluators of the OPLURD have repeatedly pointed out - in their mid-term evaluation and later evaluation reports - that the 'mainstreaming' of innovative actions remains an underdeveloped feature of the programme, a sentiment which was also reflected in the ESRI's publication on National Investment Priorities for the Period 2000-2006³⁶.

In the previous section, we argued that the notion that the state institutions are 'unwilling' to learn from the experience of the Partnerships may be rather simplistic, and that more serious questions need to be asked about the actual impact of the innovative approaches that they have pioneered. This then raises questions about the precise locus of responsibility for evaluating approaches that are developed and implemented by Partnerships at local level. Is this the responsibility of individual Partnerships or should comparative evaluations be carried out collectively under the auspices of PLANET, ADM or a Government department? In the following sub-sections, we will outline what we believe to be the key aspects of 'learning through monitoring'.

4.6.1 Horizontal Learning

A very large proportion of the evaluation work undertaken by the Partnerships falls into the category of 'horizontal learning'. This typically consists of project-level evaluations which are largely descriptive in nature. These evaluations document the origins of a project, based on established needs, the process by which a strategy has been formulated - generally drawing attention to the participative nature of this process - and the experiences acquired during the project's implementation. Impacts are almost without exception conceptualised as throughputs within the projects and, where actual impacts are reported, they refer to the results achieved with respect to the participating individuals or groups only. To stay with our earlier example, an evaluation report may mention, for example, how many of the participating students successfully transferred from one school level to the next. These evaluation results are then disseminated through various channels, including the Partnership managers (PLANET), the National Network of the Community Strand, other specific networks (e.g. education co-ordinators), conferences, pamphlets (e.g. Insight series) and of course through interaction with ADM staff.

ADM has been heavily involved in facilitating horizontal learning between Partnerships. However, questions need to be asked about the purpose of horizontal learning. In the absence of an overall research design which classifies different projects along identifiable dimensions and evaluates their relative effectiveness, horizontal learning seems to be geared primarily towards implementation per se. By duplicating what three Partnerships have initially pioneered in another thirty yields little additional knowledge. Indeed, if all of the Partnerships ultimately adopt the same approach to a particular problem, one could argue that we will lose our ability to evaluate the relative effectiveness of different approaches.

Horizontal learning is, by definition, primarily oriented towards the improvement of delivery. It is thus to be welcomed that area-based Partnership are increasingly involved in the delivery of programmes aimed at those who are most disadvantaged. Joint evaluation of a new intervention may also result in greater awareness amongst local service providers, and this, in turn, is likely to have a positive effect on the attitudes of the centrally-organised institutions of the State. However, as argued throughout this study, the wide-scale delivery of social inclusion initiatives and horizontal learning are not sufficient on their own.

4.6.2 Mainstreaming and Vertical Learning

The second type of evaluation involves drawing lessons from certain types of intervention with a view to influencing key policy makers in the state administration. We note that there has been some difference in development between the Regional Monitoring Committees, on the one hand, and ADM, the Partnerships and Community Groups on the other. Whilst the formal evaluation work of the Regional Monitoring Committees seems to be increasingly focused on meeting agreed targets (and thus

36 Fitzgerald, J. et al. (1999) National Investment Priorities for the Period 2000-2006, Dublin: ESRI.

essentially on throughputs), there have been greater efforts by ADM and the representative organisations of the Partnerships and Community Groups to highlight key lessons to be learned and to draw out their policy implications. However, as pointed out by Sabel with respect to the initiatives undertaken during the PESp, and subsequently emphasised by the External Evaluators of the OPLURD, the extent to which Government departments and state agencies have generalised or 'mainstreamed' local successes and used these to implement changes in the organisation of the state administration remains disappointing.

On the positive side, the most important example remains the setting up of the Local Employment Service, which dates back to the PESp period. Possibly the two most important examples from recent years are the setting up of the Millennium Fund and the Drugs Task Force, both of which were significantly influenced by the work of the Partnerships. However, no authoritative overview has been published regarding the achievements of the Partnerships with respect to policy debates in these areas.

In fact, the channels by which the Partnerships and Community Groups can influence policy-makers are rather vague. As outlined in the previous section, and with the exception of some review mechanisms in the newly-established Drugs Task Force, there are no formal structures which bind the Partnerships and various Government departments into an overall evaluation process such as that outlined in Section 4.5; i.e. a comprehensive comparative assessment of the impact of various approaches, including a value-for-money analysis. The consultants are not aware of a single evaluation of this nature over the past ten years of local development programmes.

Possibly the most important results with regard to mainstreaming have been achieved as a result of the participation of representatives of the local development institutions on policy-influencing committees and working groups and through the elaborate system of staff secondments from key Government departments to ADM. The former frequently takes the form of the inclusion of ADM's Chief Executive Officer on these committees, but may, at times, also involve an ADM staff member or a Partnership representative. We will discuss the issue of representation on policy committees in Section 4.6.4 below. The system of secondments provides another means of networking through the relevant departments. Nevertheless, it lacks transparency as it does not include any formal arrangements either with regard to the evaluation of the Partnerships' initiatives nor about how lessons arising from these initiatives will be learned and incorporated into the respective department's work.

At this point, it may suffice to say that both of these processes are, at least in the view of the consultants, marked by an over-reliance on ADM. ADM is first and foremost an intermediate agency with responsibility for implementing a specific Government programme, and is directly answerable to a Government department. Whilst clearly having an important role in influencing policy, to rely on ADM as both the managing agency for the Partnerships and the main lobbying agency for change in the organisations of the state administration risks overloading ADM.

This is not intended as a criticism of what ADM has achieved over the past number of years, both through its formal participation in policy committees and the many informal contacts between ADM staff and the Government departments. We do, however, believe that the process by which the organisations of the state administration incorporate the experiences generated by the work of the Partnerships should be formalised, that this requires departmental leadership and that it needs to be subjected to scrutiny itself.

In this respect, the move of the OPLURD from the Department of the Taoiseach to the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation represented a major setback, as it deprived the local development programme of the leadership it needed in order to influence developments across a range of Government departments. The concentration of all local development initiatives within the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is therefore to be welcomed, as it brings with it the prospect of a greater leadership role by the Minister and his Department.

4.6.3 Evaluating Partnerships

ADM carries out formal reviews of Partnerships and Community Groups on an annual basis. The purpose of these reviews is to examine progress made in the implementation of the strategic plans against objectives and targets set. Feedback is provided to the Boards. These reviews complement local reviews and evaluations and inform the annual programmes of activities that are submitted to ADM for approval. Programmes set out key actions and associated costs for the year and include both quantitative and qualitative targets.

However, although ADM is monitoring the progress of Partnerships and Community Groups on an annual basis, no comprehensive evaluations of the individual Partnerships have yet been published. With the exception of the analysis by the external evaluators on the impact of OPLURD on long-term unemployment, no other overall evaluation of the achievements of the Partnerships has yet been carried out with regard to key objectives in the Partnerships' individual area action plans or in terms of the net impact of their presence on residents living within their area. The consultants believe that suitable tools need to be developed in order to facilitate a more general evaluation of this type. We also believe that this would be to the benefit of the Partnerships and Community Groups, as it would allow them to document their achievements in a holistic manner.

4.6.4 Representation at Policy-making Level

A large number of committees and working groups exist where the Partnership experience can be mediated to the State's functional administration. The table overleaf provides an overview of the multiplicity of structures involved.

As can be seen from the table, representation on some of the committees and working groups heavily relies on the CEO and staff of ADM, and the question arises whether the Partnerships should more directly be involved in these policy-influencing structures.

The year 2002 has seen some significant changes in PLANET, the Partnerships' network. Following a Strategic review in late 2001, PLANET produced a Three Year Business Plan for the first time, the most important element of which entails the setting up of designated policy groups. To date, four such groups have been established: (i) Employment Services, (ii) Social Economy, (iii) Community Employment, and (iv) Education and Training. Two further policy groups are planned in the immediate future dealing with (v) Childcare Policy and (vi) Community Development. It is hoped that these groups will allow the Partnerships to develop a stronger direct involvement in the policy-making arena. To the extent that PLANET becomes more experienced in policy formulation, based on the Partnerships' experience, there is a strong *prima facie* case for developing a more direct representation of Partnerships and Community Groups on many of the key policy committees.

Representation of ADM and Partnerships in Policy-making Arena

	ADM CEO	Staff	Partnerships & Community Groups
Policy Committees:			
Rural Transport Sub-committee of the Public Transport Partnership Forum		X	X
Local Government Committee for the National Anti-poverty Networks	X		
Educational Disadvantage Committee	X		
Education Disadvantage Forum		X	X
Monitoring Committee for Rapid	X		
National Co-ordinating Committee for Childcare	X		X
Social Economy Monitoring Committee		X	X
Community Development and Local Development Committee		X	
Technical Advisory Committee on Gender Equality		X	
Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordinating Committee		X	
CE Monitoring Committee		X	
Regional OPs Monitoring Committee (observer only)		X	
National Centre for Guidance and Education Board		X	
National Employment Services Advisory Committee	X		X
National Rural Development Forum		X	X
National Sustainable Development Forum (Comhar)			X
Co-ordination Group on Offenders Reintegration		X	X
Special Education and Training Fund Committee		X	
LES ad hoc Operational Committee		X	X
Framework Agreements:			
Teagasc		X	X
LES		X	X
Social Economy		X	X
CE		X	X

4.6.5 Territorial Employment Pacts³⁷

Territorial Employment Pacts originated in 1998 as a result of an EU initiative. They have since evolved in different directions, focusing to a greater or lesser extent on strategic policy issues, innovative employment projects, active research in local labour market issues, dissemination of best practice and influencing local, regional, national and EU-level policy development. With their specific labour market focus, the Pacts have developed an impressive range of policy initiatives and innovative projects. As the labour market undergoes extensive change and adaptation, and as the pace of economic and employment growth declines, the Pacts face a major challenge in re-orienting their networks to tackle the emerging situation. Also, in terms of their close association with area-based Partnerships and their location within the LDSIP, there is a need to clarify their relationship with the area-based Partnerships and Community Groups and to provide guidelines for their future work. To this end, the TEPs commissioned an external evaluation of their own work during 2001³⁸.

The resulting report highlights a number of key issues. Firstly, and as a result of the co-existence of this EU initiative with the OPLURD, the establishment of TEPs created yet another actor in the local development landscape. Therefore, their future role and relationship with existing structures is in need of clarification. The evaluators suggest that TEPs can play a valuable role in relation to research and analysis, informing both

³⁷ The authors acknowledge drawing extensively in this section on a summary paper by Aiden Lloyd (ADM).

³⁸ Fitzpatrick Associates and Mentor Economic Development Ltd. (2001) Final Evaluation - Employment Pacts.

regional socio-economic development and the work undertaken by the Partnerships in targeting the most marginalised and ensuring that opportunities arising from economic development are skewed towards the socially excluded. They further recommend that TEPs might undertake pilot work that is neither feasible nor appropriate to Partnerships, but which would assist, enhance or support the Partnerships' work in meeting the objectives of the Programme. The evaluators suggest that the focus of TEPs should be on research and analysis, especially in relation to the needs of disadvantaged target groups. Lastly, where TEPs become involved in projects, it is recommended that this engagement should be linked with the learning approach of the Partnerships in carrying out their social inclusion work.

The authors of this study largely concur with the conclusions of the Fitzpatrick/Mentor report. Indeed, even at the time of the evaluation, the Dublin Employment Pact (DEP) has already been working along the lines suggested. Unlike the other three Local Employment Pacts (Westmeath, Dundalk-Drogheda, Limerick), which are more similar to the Partnerships and Community Groups, the DEP has taken on a distinct role in elaborating on the individual experiences of different Partnerships at the regional level. It therefore does not involve itself in the direct implementation of projects on the ground, but aims at providing a strategic forum which seeks to influence policy making for the Greater Dublin Area. To this end, it has brought together the Dublin Regional Authority (including the four Local Authorities), the four City/Council Development Boards, the social partners (IBEC and ICTU), Chamber of Commerce, Government departments and representatives of the various Dublin Partnerships. In common with PLANET, the DEP works through a number of thematic policy groups. To date, it has brought out a significant number of studies which are largely based on the evaluation of the Partnerships' experiences and which are characterised by a strong policy focus. The TEPs have welcomed the findings of the external evaluation and are currently in the process to re-orient their focus in the ways suggested.

4.6.6 The State's Ability to Learn from the Partnership Experience

The Partnerships' work involves a multiplicity of organisations, structures and something in excess of 4,000 professionals and volunteers. The Partnerships' main motivation is their commitment to their local areas and to the most disadvantaged groups and individuals within them. Whilst they are obviously keen to see their experiences reflected in the policies and working practices of the organisations of the state administration, they cannot be held responsible for this, as this responsibility ultimately rests with the State.

We have brought forward strong arguments that the State can enhance its own directive capacity by incorporating the experiences provided by the innovative work of the Partnerships. The overall cost of the Local Development Programme is small compared to its potential benefits, both in terms of the potential gains in efficiency for many of the services delivered by the State, as well as the greater cohesion achieved amongst communities and in localities which have persistently failed to share in the benefits which most Irish citizens take for granted.

For the project of democratic experimentalism to work, Partnerships need to be semi-independent, not overburdened with the implementation of large-scale programmes and they need to operate in a safe and secure financial environment. On the Partnerships' side, it is essential to avoid bureaucratisation, to continue to be innovative, to retain a strong policy focus and, most importantly, to learn to contribute to the evaluation of impacts rather than throughputs.

5 Recommendations

This study has provided a comprehensive rationale for the existence of area-based Partnerships. This rationale is centred on a clear conceptual understanding of how deprivation and space interact, the need to extend the Partnership process from the national to the local level and the potential gains for the state administration if it learns to draw on the Partnerships' experience. In the context of the evolution of local development in Ireland over the past decade, the consultants have developed the following recommendations:

Recommendation No. 1

Based on extensive consultations with the Partnerships, Community Groups, Employment Pacts and ADM, there appears to be far-reaching agreement about the main thrust of this report. There is now an urgent need for the other players in the local development arena to respond to this deeper understanding of the role of area-based Partnerships in addressing multiple deprivation in the most disadvantaged urban and rural communities. The failure of successive local development programmes to spell out the main purpose of area-based initiatives and the processes of cumulative disadvantage that need to be addressed leaves these programmes prone to an ad hoc interpretation which cannot be allowed to continue.

Recommendation No. 2

There is a fundamental need for the State to draw on experiences that go beyond those offered by its own institutions. This is particularly the case as far as structural and supply-side policies at local level are concerned. Through their innovative work, area-based Partnerships offer a rich 'laboratory' from which, if properly evaluated, the state administration can learn and thus enhance its own effectiveness and efficiency. Charles Sabel, in his 1996 evaluation of the Irish Partnership experience, refers to this process as 'democratic experimentalism'. Unfortunately, this concept is frequently misunderstood, particularly by key Government departments and state agencies.

Recommendation No. 3

To make the project of 'democratic experimentalism' work, a much more scientific approach to monitoring and evaluation is needed. Currently, the monitoring environment is mainly occupied with the numerical assessment of throughputs. Where impacts are being evaluated, these relate predominantly to impacts on individuals (results) and processes. However, comparatively little is known about the relative merits of different approaches to tackling poverty and deprivation, nor do we know what of the impact of the Partnerships' activities is both on the actual level of deprivation experienced in the most disadvantaged areas and the relative life chances of their residents. A fundamental rethinking of the whole monitoring framework is therefore needed, including the question of whose responsibility it is to undertake overall and comparative impact assessments.

Recommendation No. 4

There is a need for an unequivocal statement to be made by Government in relation to the role of the Partnerships in addressing cumulative deprivation in Ireland's most disadvantaged areas and as a laboratory of learning with a view to improving local development systems, including:

- i. a clarification that the key role of area-based Partnerships and Community Groups is to address the problems of cumulative deprivation and neighbourhood effects which arise out of the clustering of disadvantage amongst certain groups and communities

- ii. an acknowledgement that area-based Partnerships will continue to be supported in the medium to long term
- iii. a commitment that Partnerships will continue to receive secure and sufficient core funding
- iv. a statement that underlines their importance in influencing policy-making rather than being delivery agents alone
- v. a commitment to establishing adequate institutional frameworks by which the State's agencies can learn from the innovations piloted by the Partnerships.

Recommendation No. 5

The LDSIP Guidelines are arguably too narrow with respect to the description of actions which the individual Partnerships may engage in. They fail to take sufficiently into account the context within which the different Partnerships operate and have, in practice, led to an overly prescriptive approach to what the Partnerships can and cannot do. In the future, greater emphasis should therefore be placed on allowing Partnerships to respond to this context as they see fit, as long as they can demonstrate that their action plans are based on a comprehensive partnership approach at local level and that they represent a reasonable, consensual and strategic approach to the problems of social exclusion as they are collectively identified. At the same time, the Partnerships have to understand that many of their actions form part of a wider research agenda which imposes stringent requirements in terms of the evaluation of actions in the context of a national strategy of comparative impact assessment.

Recommendation No. 6

ADM and the Partnerships need to take greater care to avoid becoming a mere delivery instrument for major initiatives targeted at the disadvantaged, particularly where such initiatives no longer entail any significant element of innovation. Partnerships must therefore strengthen their strategic input into local development and policy formulation.

Recommendation No. 7

Partnerships should be evaluated with respect to their own area action plans and their impact on the level of deprivation experienced in their own areas. Ultimately, their influence on policy may be more important than the numbers of individuals who directly benefit from their actions.

Recommendation No. 8

Partnerships, Community Groups and ADM should welcome any consultative process towards the building of effective local development structures. Such process should include:

- i. an assessment of the prospects of achieving a greater integration between the Partnership and LEADER companies;
- ii. an exploration of whether there is a need to establish Partnership companies in those counties where they do not currently exist, including what this might mean for Community Groups in these counties;
- iii. an exploration of what support structures might be necessary in order to allow Partnerships and Community Groups to play an effective role within the County Development Boards and Social Inclusion Measures Groups;

However, whatever structures arise, they must take heed of the conceptual underpinnings for area-based local development structures outlined in this paper. They must be focused on a specific area, respond to local needs, relate to forms of

cumulative deprivation, have social inclusion as their central tenet, be based on a partnership approach, enjoy a degree of freedom to maximise their ability to develop innovative responses to the problems identified and be committed to monitoring and evaluation as a means of influencing the wider policy agenda with regard to social inclusion. Finally, they must be well-resourced and secure of their future status in order to carry out their responsibilities both within their respective localities and in the county, regional and national policy arenas. If all of these conditions are met, then the question of organisational structures is of secondary importance.

Recommendation No. 9

The Territorial Employment Pacts should continue to re-focus their work as outlined by the recommendations in the Fitzpatrick/Mentor evaluation, and summarised in the position paper of Aiden Lloyd (ADM):

- i. It is essential to have a clear separation between Pacts and other local development structures so as to ensure a distinct role adding value to local development initiatives and avoiding duplication of effort and activities.
- ii. Employment Pacts should be separate entities and operate at a regional level.
- iii. Employment Pacts should be required to network with all relevant local authorities, statutory agencies, social partners and other bodies within their region involved with employment policy development and implementation.
- iv. Employment Pacts should link directly with Regional Authorities in a manner similar to the relationship of Partnerships to CDBs.

Recommendation No. 10

Partnerships and Community Groups need to be given greater direct representation within key policy-making committees and steering groups. The policy groups of PLANET may take on a significant role in this respect.

Recommendation No. 11

There is a lack of institutional structures and shared evaluation frameworks which allows key Government departments and state agencies to internalise the experiences provided by the innovative actions of the Partnerships. It is the duty of Government to make sure that all key departments and state agencies are fully committed to the partnership process and that adequate steps are taken to ensure collective evaluation and learning.

Appendix 1:

Monitoring Poverty Trends in Ireland: Results from the 2000 Living in Ireland Survey

By Brian Nolan, Brenda Gannon, Richard Layte, Dorothy Watson, Christopher T. Whelan and James Williams

The ESRI's study updates the picture of poverty in Ireland revealed by the Living in Ireland Survey carried out in 2000. The publication is the latest in a series monitoring living standards and assessing progress towards achieving the targets of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. It describes trends in the extent of poverty, profiles those affected, and recommends how to monitor poverty in the future as living standards change.

- * Deprivation levels (measured by a variety of non-monetary indicators) continue to fall, e.g., in 2000 only 3% of respondents said they could not afford to buy new, rather than second-hand, clothes compared to 10% in 1994.
- * Consistent poverty continued to decline. In 2000, only 6% were below 60% of mean income and experiencing basic deprivation compared with 15% in 1994.
- * The target of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy is now to bring the numbers of 'consistently poor' below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminate it altogether.
- * The number below relative income thresholds, e.g. half of average income - have not been falling, in fact they were often higher in 2000 than in 1997 or 1994.
- * By 2000 unemployment had fallen sharply and there had been substantial real income growth, including growth in social welfare payments.
- * However, since social welfare levels did not rise as rapidly as income from work and property, more social welfare recipients in 2000 had fallen below thresholds linked to average income.
- * Those affected by illness or disability, and those aged 65 or over - many relying on social welfare - are particularly likely to be below relative income thresholds. This is of particular concern for the longer term, as growth slows down and societal expectations adjust to higher living standards.
- * The authors suggest broadening the scope of medium-term poverty targets, to include not only the number in consistent poverty but also the number below relative income thresholds. Taken together, these would capture both the contribution of growth in reducing deprivation and the long-term implications of widening gaps.
- * The study re-examines the construction of the consistent poverty measure. So far, eight basic deprivation items have been included, and up to 2000 they were still capturing what would be widely seen as generalised deprivation. However, in monitoring poverty looking forward it would be appropriate to include some additional items (such as being able to afford to replace worn-out furniture).

Appendix 2:

Unemployment Rates and Overall Deprivation Scores for Partnership Areas, based on 1996 OPLURD Boundaries

Area APC	Partnership Company APC_NAME	TOTAL POPULA- TION %	1991 UNEMP- LOYMENT RATE	MEAN RFS	TOTAL POPULA- TION %	1996 UNEMP- LOYMENT RATE	MEAN RFS RATE	Change in UNEMP- LOYMENT	MEAN RFS
101	Ballyfermot	22643	37.5	10.0	21149	35.7	10.0	-1.80	0.00
102	Ballymun	17045	44.6	10.0	16566	41.9	10.0	-2.76	0.00
103	Blanchardstown	36079	21.0	5.6	38612	17.8	4.7	-3.24	-0.91
104	Clondalkin	49158	23.8	7.0	57517	18.5	5.5	-5.32	-1.52
105	Crumlin/Kimmage/ Walkinstown	61081	19.7	6.6	58117	17.9	6.5	-1.73	-0.14
106	Dublin Inner City	81508	31.8	8.6	91998	27.1	7.0	-4.74	-1.60
107	Dun Laoghaire	67836	12.9	3.0	66806	10.7	2.4	-2.19	-0.60
108	Finglas/Cabra	58228	24.6	8.1	55519	22.6	7.6	-1.98	-0.52
109	Northside	105984	19.9	5.7	101449	16.2	4.3	-3.64	-1.37
110	Rialto/Kilmainham/ Bluebell/Inchicore	13079	29.4	9.5	12442	28.9	9.2	-0.49	-0.36
111	Tallaght	70819	22.9	7.1	71830	20.9	5.9	-2.01	-1.25
201	Bray	16978	20.6	3.6	16897	17.4	3.6	-3.21	-0.04
202	Cork City	127253	21.1	5.8	127187	20.8	5.2	-0.34	-0.54
203	Drogheda	23848	24.6	8.0	24460	19.5	7.0	-5.14	-1.00
204	Dundalk	25843	26.4	9.0	25762	22.0	8.0	-4.32	-1.00
205	Galway City	50853	15.3	3.7	57241	14.5	2.8	-0.77	-0.89
206	Limerick City	52083	25.3	6.5	52039	20.9	5.6	-4.39	-0.89
207	Tralee	25118	18.4	5.0	27337	17.8	3.8	-0.54	-1.24
208	Waterford City	40328	21.0	6.4	42540	18.8	5.4	-2.17	-1.00
209	Wexford Town	28825	17.2	5.3	29873	15.0	4.3	-2.25	-1.05
301	Cavan	52796	12.6	6.5	52944	11.5	6.7	-1.06	0.24
302	Donegal Central	79768	22.0	7.4	81684	19.6	7.2	-2.40	-0.13
303	Donegal Gaeltacht	22415	34.0	9.1	22093	29.6	9.5	-4.39	0.41
304	Donegal Inishowen	25934	29.0	9.2	26217	24.7	9.7	-4.30	0.43
305	Galway	108140	12.9	5.5	109301	11.8	5.5	-1.13	-0.04
306	Galway Connemara Gaeltacht	23471	25.9	6.9	24308	22.7	7.1	-3.27	0.20
307	Kerry South	41305	15.1	5.5	43996	13.2	5.1	-1.94	-0.37
308	Leitrim	25301	13.7	7.1	25057	12.6	6.7	-1.10	-0.44
309	Longford	30296	14.9	7.0	30166	14.6	6.5	-0.33	-0.49
310	Mayo	108613	16.1	7.0	109528	16.4	7.0	0.37	-0.03
311	Monaghan	51293	14.2	6.6	51313	12.9	6.7	-1.31	0.08
312	Offaly North & Kildare North West	35531	18.8	6.2	37541	14.6	5.6	-4.22	-0.51
313	Roscommon	51897	10.2	5.6	51975	9.6	5.1	-0.57	-0.47
314	Sligo	54756	14.8	5.5	55821	13.4	4.9	-1.44	-0.64
315	Waterford	51296	15.9	4.4	52140	14.0	4.3	-1.95	-0.05
316	West Limerick	52834	13.9	4.3	54261	9.9	3.6	-3.92	-0.68
317	Westmeath	48204	14.0	4.7	49895	12.2	4.2	-1.81	-0.47
318	Wexford	73244	20.1	6.2	74498	17.6	6.6	-2.47	0.46
	Dublin	583460	23.5	6.8	592005	20.6	5.8	-2.93	-0.95
	Other Urban	391129	21.0	5.8	403336	18.9	5.0	-2.08	-0.84
	Rural	937094	16.5	6.2	952738	14.8	6.0	-1.76	-0.14
	All Partnerships	1911683	19.7	6.3	1948079	17.5	5.8	-2.19	-0.53
	Non-Partnership areas	1614036	13.6	3.7	1678008	11.6	3.3	-2.00	-0.32
	Ireland	3525719	16.9	5.1	3626087	14.8	4.6	-2.13	-0.45

Appendix 3:

The Statistical Measurement of Neighbourhood Effects

Prepared by Jonathan Pratschke

Social scientists have been concerned about the effects on families and children of living in poor neighbourhoods for at least sixty years (Shaw & McKay, 1942). However, interest in the conceptualisation and measurement of the influence of the neighbourhood context on the development and educational attainments of young people increased during the 1980s and 1990s, primarily due to a growing awareness that in the developed countries poverty was becoming more urban, spatially-concentrated and clustered with other indicators of disadvantage.

Primarily as a result of industrial restructuring and changes in state policy, trends encouraging the geographical concentration of poverty accelerated during the 1980s and 1990s, leading to the development of concentrated areas of inner-city poverty in the United States (Jargowsky, 1997; Massey, 1996; Wilson, 1987) and to the deterioration of living conditions in the large peripheral housing estates located outside many European cities (Wacquant, 1996). As we indicated in Chapter Two of this report, residents in neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty experience multiple forms of social and economic disadvantage. As Rutter (1989) and Rutter et al. (1995) point out, it is not just single risk factors that determine child and family outcomes, but the accumulation of a range of risk and protective factors. For example, Gephart (1997) notes in relation to the American context that “[c]ommunities characterised by high levels of social and economic disadvantage also have high rates of child abuse, infant mortality, and low birth weight” (p. 26). Garner and Raudenbush (1991), using a sample of adolescents from a Scottish education authority in the mid-1980s, demonstrate that neighbourhood deprivation (measured by a deprivation score comprising twelve economic, demographic and housing measures derived from the 1981 Census of Population) has a negative and highly significant effect on years of completed schooling. Moreover, as Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn (2000) note, “Risk and protective factors occur at multiple levels - individual, family, peer group, school, and neighbourhood; the effects of each may vary for particular subgroups of children or families” (p. 310).

Research on the impact of the neighbourhood environment on child development developed rapidly during the 1990s (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan et al., 1993; Chase-Lansdale and Gordon, 1996; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn and Klebanov, 1994). Wilson's work (1987, 1991, 1993, 1996) provided the framework for many contributions to this research literature. Wilson shows that the greater concentration of urban poverty has led to the social isolation of poor neighbourhoods in the major industrial cities of the United States (Wilson, 1987), due primarily to the restructuring of the American economy away from manufacturing and the relocation of the remaining manufacturing firms out of central locations, with the consequent drop in demand for unskilled urban labour. He suggests that poor inner-city neighbourhoods in the United States have become socially isolated, in the sense that their residents lack contact with individuals and institutions representing mainstream society. This lack of contact marginalises residents from job networks and engenders a set of ghetto-specific norms and behaviours that make steady work more problematic (Lehman & Smeeding, 1997: 256-7): “What followed from this social isolation was a downward spiral of neighbourhood dislocation. Employment plummeted, marriage and education lost their attractiveness, and crime rose. The cycle became self-perpetuating as families living in those neighbourhoods had to cope with the set of experiences that Wilson called concentration effects. In his more recent work (Wilson, 1996), Wilson has argued that during the 1980s those concentration effects interacted with the arrival of crack cocaine, AIDS, and rising homelessness, on the one hand, and the drop in counter-cyclical governmental interventions, on the other” (Lehman & Smeeding, 1997: 257).

Jencks and Mayer (1990) draw on Wilson's work to specify a series of potential mechanisms through which the effects of neighbourhood socio-economic composition might operate, including collective socialisation (how adults from within the community influence youth who are not their children by providing role models and by monitoring young people within the community), institutional mechanisms which involve adults from outside the community, working in schools, welfare agencies, police etc., epidemic mechanisms which involve peer

influences, imitation, peer pressure etc., social comparison mechanisms (young people compare themselves with those around them), competition for scarce resources and cultural conflict (formation of subcultures of resistance). Social disorganisation theorists (Kornhauser, 1978) view structural factors such as residential mobility, population turnover, family disruption, population heterogeneity, housing/population density and poverty as potential obstacles to systemic social organisation. It is hypothesised that these factors are linked with the density of acquaintanceship, intergenerational kinship ties, organisational participation, collective supervision and shared norms. Sampson (1992) links social disorganisation theory with child development by positing that the effects of community-level structural factors such as the above are mediated by community-level processes such as the observability, monitoring and supervision of youth, intergenerational closure among adult-child networks, control of street-corner peer groups, local organisational participation, mutual social support and the extensiveness of social networks, which influence rates of delinquency and crime as well as health-related aspects of child development and family management.

Initial attempts to quantify neighbourhood effects were relatively unsophisticated, involving the use of aggregate-level predictors (typically derived from the Census of Population) in an individual-level statistical model (Garbarino and Crouter, 1978). Indeed, this approach remains dominant within the fields of Social Psychology and Sociology, amongst researchers who are interested in the relationship between social context and developmental outcomes (Crane, 1991; Clark, 1992; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan et al., 1993; Chase-Lansdale and Gordon, 1996; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn and Klebanov, 1994). We will begin by summarising some of the results of these studies (most of which were conducted in the United States) before discussing the methodological challenges posed by the measurement of neighbourhood effects.

Brooks-Gunn, Duncan et al. (1993) examined the impact of neighbourhoods, singly and in concert with family-level variables, on school leaving and out-of-wedlock childbearing among adolescent females in the United States, using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). In an attempt to distinguish between the effects of poor and affluent neighbours, they included distinct indicators of the presence or absence of low- and high-income neighbours. They found that neighbourhood effects are often statistically significant - at times rivaling family effects - and that to the extent that the economic characteristics of neighbourhoods affect child development, the absence of affluent neighbours is more important than the presence of low-income neighbours. This confirms the importance of Wilson's thesis regarding 'concentration effects' within poor neighbourhoods and the importance of social heterogeneity for the survival of local organisations and institutions.

Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1994) found that residing in a poor neighbourhood was associated with a less conducive physical environment in the home and with less maternal warmth. Sampson & Groves (1989), using data from the 1982 and 1984 British Crime Surveys, found that communities characterised by sparse friendship networks, unsupervised teenage peer groups, and low organisational participation had disproportionately higher rates of crime and delinquency. Variations in these processes mediated the effects of community socio-demographic and structural characteristics: 80 per cent of the effect of socio-economic composition on mugging and street robbery was mediated by an indicator of unsupervised teenage youth. Crane (1991) found non-linear effects of neighbourhood quality on school dropout: in neighbourhoods with very few professional or managerial workers (5% or fewer), both blacks and whites who lived in the worst neighbourhoods were over 50 times more likely to drop out of school than were their counterparts in neighbourhoods with greater social heterogeneity (Crane, 1991: 35). The most powerful neighbourhood effects have been detected during early childhood and in late adolescence, perhaps because during these two developmental stages families are most dependent upon community resources. Duncan & Aber (1997) suggest that the neighbourhood context can have strong indirect effects on young children as a result of the quality of available childcare, the safety and stimulation of parks, playgrounds and other neighbourhood resources, the parenting practices of other adults and the nature of parenting practices within the home.

In the existing studies, the characteristics of neighbourhoods most often found to influence children's intellectual and behavioural development are the presence of affluent or middle-class neighbours (Gephart, 1997: 41), racial/ethnic diversity and residential instability (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000: 313). The first influence is particularly stable across studies, and researchers have suggested that adult role models and the presence of peers whose families have high educational aspirations may be important, along with the number and

quality of neighbourhood and community organisations and amenities including the availability of supervised youth activities. Even young children may be influenced by their neighbourhood environment, as the choices that parents make in the face of neighbourhood risk factors (e.g. keeping the child indoors for their own protection) can have an influence on their development.

Chase-Lansdale et al. (1997) prioritise neighbourhood resources and collective socialisation as the most important sources of neighbourhood effects. The former relates to the presence of parks, libraries, sports leagues, arts and crafts classes, private gardens, health clinics and doctors, and the latter to Wilson's notion of 'social isolation' (1991b) and Sampson's version of 'social disorganisation' theory (Sampson, 1992; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Wilson, 1994): "These theories propose that neighbourhoods which are not isolated nor disorganised have high aggregate levels of factors such as parental self-efficacy, emphasis on school and work skills, and future orientation. In some such communities, neighbours may encourage higher quality parenting and help supervise neighbourhood children (Garbarino & Crouter, 1978; Garbarino and Sherman, 1980). Among families with young children, these parents might share ways to deal with persistent temper tantrums, compare strategies for encouraging a child's budding talents, or one parent might supervise a neighbourhood outing to a nearby park." (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1997: 82). These mechanisms become increasingly important as children enter childcare and elementary schools, both because collective organisation and resources are crucial at this stage and because the schools themselves bring children and adults together, facilitating friendships, supports, influences and networks. Indeed, Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn (2000) point out that "[a]lthough the existing literature on indirect neighbourhood effects is scant, we have found growing evidence for the role of relationships and norms/collective efficacy, especially the role of peers and informal social control. ... To advance the understanding of neighbourhood effects, researchers must combine family and individual process data that are typically collected in regional and city-based studies with valid and reliable neighbourhood measures that are usually available in national data sets or neighbourhood-based studies..." (p. 310).

As far as the presence of affluent neighbours is concerned, Brooks-Gunn et al. (1993) report that residence in census tracts with a high percentage of middle-class, highly-educated and high-income individuals is positively associated with children's IQ scores at age 3, controlling for a range of family-level variables. These authors also show that residence in relatively affluent areas is also associated with fewer behavioural problems amongst young children. Dornbusch, Ritter & Steinberg (1991) and Entwisle et al. (1994) show that the percentage of high socio-economic status residents is also associated with the educational achievements of adolescents, particularly for young males (cf. Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993 in relation to school completed by older adolescents). Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn (2000) provide the following summary: "Several studies have found other indicators of neighbourhood SES, such as the high school dropout rate, levels of female family-headship and female employment, and the number of managerial and professional workers, to be associated with educational attainment. ... Neighbourhood effects were reported even when researchers used estimation techniques to address the problem of omitted variable bias..." (p. 318). A range of studies indicate that residing in a low-SES neighbourhood is associated with higher rates of criminal and delinquent behaviour amongst adolescents as well as a higher incidence of behavioural problems (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Brooks-Gunn et al. (1993) show that neighbourhoods with a relatively weak socio-economic composition tend to generate an increased risk of adolescent and non-marital childbearing for their residents.

As far as ethnic diversity is concerned, Chase-Lansdale & Gordon (1996) report that family residence in an ethnically diverse neighbourhood is negatively associated with verbal ability among young children, particularly European Americans, although "[I]t appears that residing in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods (presence of Latinos and foreign-born individuals) and neighbourhoods with few African Americans is positively associated with African American young men's years of schooling completed and college attendance" (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 1993). Sampson & Groves (1989), in a British study, report that residing in neighbourhoods with greater ethnic heterogeneity is positively associated with involvement in criminal activity amongst adolescents. Neighbourhood residential instability has been linked to substance use amongst older children (Ennett et al., 1997), and Sampson & Groves (1989) also found evidence that high rates of residential instability is associated with adolescent juvenile delinquency and crime.

As far as effect sizes are concerned, Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn (2000) provide the following summary: "The effect sizes reported for neighbourhood structural influences (measured by means of census data) in this review were surprisingly consistent in the national studies and the regional studies with neighbourhood-based designs, at least for achievement and high SES and for juvenile delinquency and low SES and residential instability. Neighbourhood effects were small to moderate and accounted for about 5% of the variance in child outcomes, after controlling for a host of family-level characteristics (family income, family structure, maternal education, maternal age, and race/ethnicity)" (p. 328). Arguably, however, the estimated effects of the neighbourhood context would be larger if the appropriate methodological tools were applied. In fact, despite the intrinsic interest of the research summarised in the previous paragraphs, it is characterised by a number of methodological shortcomings that cast doubt on the robustness of its findings.

Firstly, the inclusion of aggregate data in an individual-level statistical model gives rise to a number of problems, including a condition known as 'heteroscedasticity' which leads to biased statistical tests. The source of these errors of estimation is the multilevel structure of the data: neighbourhood effects exist at a different level to individual attributes: individuals are 'nested' within schools and neighbourhoods. By collapsing measurements relating to different levels of social reality, we lose this complex structure of variability and introduce misleading assumptions. In fact, school and neighbourhood characteristics do not vary across all individuals, as there is no variation between individuals in the same school or neighbourhood. However, the classical linear regression model (the statistical technique most frequently used to analyse neighbourhood effects in the aforementioned studies) assumes that observations are independently sampled. Clearly, this is not the case where individuals are sampled within schools or neighbourhoods. Moreover, the influence of individual characteristics may vary according to the context. Thus, the individual and his or her social context provide distinct sources of variability, and this necessitates a distinct type of statistical analysis (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Hox, 2002; Kreft & de Leeuw, 1998; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). The most appropriate statistical tool for conducting this analysis is Multilevel Analysis (more specifically, the Hierarchical Linear Model), an extension of the multiple linear regression model to include nested random coefficients.

Because of the bias generated by the inclusion of aggregate-level variables in an individual-level model, some researchers have chosen to aggregate all variables and to conduct their analysis at the level of the school or neighbourhood. However, this approach can give rise to misleading results (Snijders & Bosker, 1999: 15) and prevents us from examining 'cross-level interactions' (i.e. where the effect of an individual-level variable depends on the neighbourhood context). This is why Aitkin & Longford (1986) argue that working with aggregate data "is dangerous at best, and disastrous at worst" (p. 42). Snijders & Bosker (1999) concur: "Our conclusion is that if the macro-units have any meaningful relation with the phenomenon under study, analysing only aggregated or only disaggregated data is apt to lead to misleading and erroneous conclusions. A multilevel approach, in which within-group and between-group relations are combined, is more difficult but much more productive" (p. 16).

Taking the example of pupils nested within schools, the dependency inherent in the secondary units (pupils) may be due to the fact that they share the same school environment, the same teachers, that they interact with each other and are influenced by group norms. Multilevel Analysis enables us to estimate the effect of the school environment on individual educational achievements, controlling for the individual aptitude of pupils, and to analyse how the relationship between individual attributes (such as aptitude, gender, family background, etc.) and educational achievements varies according to the school environment. For example, we might ask whether children from disadvantaged families have lower achievement rates in schools with a high percentage of such children. Garner & Raudenbush (1991) use Multilevel Analysis to analyse neighbourhood effects, and report a highly-significant effect for neighbourhood deprivation on general achievement test scores at the completion of secondary school.

Multilevel models use a probability model to represent the variability within and between groups, which means that the unexplained variation both within and between groups is regarded as 'random' variability. In the form of the hierarchical linear model, multilevel models differ from the classical linear regression model by virtue of having more than one 'error' term; the basic idea is that the outcome variable has an individual and a group aspect. Thus, rather

than estimating a single intercept and a single slope for each independent variable, these terms are allowed to take on a distribution in the hierarchical linear model (hence the use of the term 'random'). By allowing the intercept to vary across groups, we allow for differences in means between the groups (be they schools, neighbourhoods or other aggregates). By allowing the slopes to vary, we allow for differences in the effect of each independent variable within each group (so that the effect of aptitude on exam results can vary between schools, for example). Because both the intercept and the slopes are treated as 'random variables', they can become dependent variables in group-level regression equations. Thus, not only can we allow for differences in mean achievements and in the relationship between aptitude and educational achievements, for example, but we can also evaluate the influence of a series of aggregate-level variables on these differences.

Although multilevel analysis focuses on nested random coefficients, differently structured random coefficients can also be incorporated in the multilevel model. For example, we may wish to evaluate the influence of neighbourhoods and schools on the educational attainments of young people. Although schools are physically nested within neighbourhoods, they usually attract pupils from several different neighbourhoods, and these two aggregates - schools and neighbourhoods - must therefore be treated as 'crossed factors' (Snijders & Bosker, 1999: 155).

Due partly to the influence of multilevel modelling, researchers have become much more sensitive to the importance of measuring contextual effects in an appropriate manner. For example, family researchers have started to view family relationships as forming a complex multilevel structure, in which dyadic relationships are nested within families (Snijders & Kenny, 1999), and in which the nature of family relationships is modelled using crossed random effects. Barnett et al. (1995) and James, Barnett & Brennan (1998) apply multilevel modelling techniques to family data.

Apart from their failure to model multilevel structure correctly, another problem with the American studies summarised earlier is related to 'selection bias': "If important unmeasured characteristics of families lead them both to choose certain kinds of neighbourhoods and to have children with different developmental trajectories, then the apparent effects of neighbourhoods on these trajectories that we estimate in our simple models could either over- or understate true effects" (Duncan, Connell & Klebanov, 1997: 220). For example, those parents who are least equipped to deal with poor neighbourhoods may be precisely those who are most likely to live in them (overestimation), although some parents may adopt various strategies to compensate for their poorer residential location (underestimation) (Duncan et al., 1997). One of the limits of spatial analysis of Census data is the inability to distinguish between non-random selection processes (e.g. families choose neighbourhoods on the basis of their preferences and priorities, not just their income) and contextual effects. This can be overcome, at least in part, by using panel data which follow families over time and by modelling residential preference explicitly, or by conducting sibling-based analyses (Aaronson, 1997).

A different, and in many ways superior approach is represented by the evaluation of the Gautreaux Assisted Housing Program (Rosenbaum, Kulieke & Rubinowitz, 1988; Kaufman & Rosenbaum, 1992). Interestingly, this evaluation study reports very significant contextual effects. During the course of this programme (which lasted from the mid-1970s until 1990), low income African American families from public housing estates in Chicago were moved to private housing in suburban estates or to public housing in another part of the city, on the basis of housing availability, leading to a quasi-experimental design with randomly-selected 'treatment' and 'control' groups (Rosenbaum & Popkin, 1991). Comparing the outcomes of children whose families were moved to the suburbs with those who were moved to inner-city neighbourhoods, researchers found massive differences in school drop-out rates (5% versus 20%), completion of college education (40% versus 24%) and college enrolments (54% versus 21%). In terms of employment, suburban movers were much more likely to be employed (75% versus 41%) at the end of the study.

On the basis of these results, the Department of Housing and Urban Development in the United States conducted a new experiment, known as 'Moving to Opportunity', involving randomised assignment to public housing, private housing in the city and private housing in affluent areas (2,000 families were assigned to these three groups). Ludwig, Duncan & Hirschfield (1998) use data from this study to analyse criminal activity among adolescents

between the ages of 13 and 17: "Their findings indicated that for boys, youth who moved to low-poverty neighbourhoods were less likely to be arrested for violent crimes (assaults, robbery, rape and other sex crimes) than were their peers who stayed in public housing in poor neighbourhoods or their peers who moved out of public housing, but moved to predominantly low-to-middle-income neighbourhoods. Among youth who moved to low-to-middle-income neighbourhoods, crime rates for non-violent and non-property crimes, such as drug offences, were significantly lower than the rates for youth who remained in public housing in poor neighbourhoods. These results were found even after using an instrumental variable approach to address problems of selection bias" (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000: 320). Although studies such as these are extremely useful in demonstrating the magnitude of contextual effects, they are difficult to administer and provide limited insights into the main factors responsible for generating the observed differences. Multilevel Analysis has the potential to provide an answer to this question, although the issue of selection bias must be tackled.

The third methodological issue raised by the study of neighbourhood effects is related to their causal mediation by more 'proximal' variables. As Duncan & Aber (1997) point out, when we seek to estimate the direct effect of neighbourhoods on an outcome variable, we should also include family-level and individual-level variables that may be correlated with these (cf. Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000: 314). However, the inclusion of these variables is likely to reduce the direct effect of contextual variables, as neighbourhood effects are at least partly mediated by processes that are internal to the family. This suggests that a statistical model comprising indirect causal pathways may be required in order to gain an adequate understanding of the role of the neighbourhood context in shaping family outcomes. This is not currently possible using standard forms of Multilevel Analysis, although the generalisation of the Structural Equation Model to include multilevel structures provides a means of achieving this goal (Bentler, 2000; Duncan et al., 1997; Kaplan & Elliott, 1997; Muthen, 1994, 1997).

The construction of multilevel structural equation models also offers the possibility of using latent variables to obtain more accurate measures of neighbourhood characteristics. When individual variables that contain large amounts of 'error' (i.e. variance that is not related to the attribute of interest) are used as predictors in a statistical model, the causal effect of the factors in question is likely to be underestimated. This is particularly important in the study of neighbourhood effects, as we are frequently forced to use data that were not collected explicitly for this purpose. For example, the use of latent variables enables us to use a combination of variables from the Census of Population in order to estimate complex, unobservable phenomena such as 'demographic decline' and 'labour market deprivation'.

In conclusion, it is clear that the measurement of neighbourhood effects involves conceptual as well as statistical developments, particularly in relation to the specification of theoretical hypotheses that take space into account in an explicit manner. In a range of different areas of inquiry, social scientists are increasingly aware that social structures and processes are not situated in a vacuum, but have a spatial articulation that is of fundamental importance. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges in contemporary social theory and methodology is to incorporate the spatial (and temporal) aspects of social structures and processes into our theoretical and statistical models (Archer, 1995). Only in this way can we hope to answer key questions such as those discussed in this report.

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