



Community Work Ireland working collectively to support and promote community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and advancing human rights

Community Work Ireland,
Westside Community Resource Centre
Seamus Quirke Road Galway
Phone: +353 (0) 87 9326467/+353 (0) 87 2998619
Email: info@communityworkireland.ie
Website: www.communityworkireland.ie

Department of Rural and Community Development

Statement of Strategy

Community Work Ireland Submission October 2017

Introduction

Established in 1981ⁱ Community Work Ireland is the national organisation that promotes and supports community work/community development as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities. CWI is a membership organisation comprising over 800 individuals and organisations that support community work/community development and work in the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland. For 25 years Community Work Ireland, has played an important role in working to advance policy and programmes that meet the real and pressing needs of disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland seeking to ensure the meaningful participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Nationally, Community Work Ireland participates as an active member of the Community Platformⁱⁱ and through the Platform in the Community and Voluntary Pillarⁱⁱⁱ. Internationally, CWI is represented on the European Community Development Network^{iv} and the International Association for Community Development^v. CWI is a member of the European Network against Racism Ireland^{vi} and of the Refugee and Migrant Coalition^{vii}. CWI is also a member of the Women's Human Rights Alliance^{viii} and the National Women's Council of Ireland^{ix}

CWI has two representatives on the Department of Rural and Community Development's Cross Sectoral Working Group on the Framework Policy on Local and Community Development.

In 2018, CWI will host the World Community Development Conference 2018 in association with the Department of Applied Social Studies at Maynooth University and the International Association for Community Development. The conference is being supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

Community development is a professional discipline and approach based on the principles of participation, collectivity, community empowerment, social justice & Sustainable development, human rights, equality & anti-discrimination^x. It is an approach to addressing significant social and economic issues that emphasises early intervention and the involvement, engagement and participation of those affected by these issues in the process of needs identification and strategy/project development to address these needs.

Community development involves promoting the rights and voice of marginalised groups including Travellers, Roma, other minority ethnic groups, migrants, LGBTI people, older people and people with disability^{xi} recognising the multiple barriers and forms of oppression and discrimination experienced in particular, by women from these communities.

Community Development is "A developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way"^{xii}

It is within this context that CWI welcomes the establishment of the Department of Rural and Community Development and the opportunity to submit to the development of the department's Statement of Strategy.

Values and Principles

The values which underpin the strategy, approach and work of the Department will be crucial in informing how the Department carries out its functions. The Cross Sectoral Working Group for the Framework Policy on Local and Community Development have adopted a number of values and principles which CWI believes should form the basis of the Departments overall values and principles. The values set out below are based on those agreed by the cross sectoral working group.

Values

Active Participation

A commitment to active participation of all stakeholders, including citizens and non-citizens. Participation is rooted in the belief that communities have the right to identify their own needs and interests and outcomes required to meet them. Building active participation involves a recognition that policies and programmes targeted at communities and groups will not and cannot be effective without the meaningful participation of those communities in their design, implementation and monitoring.

Empowering Communities

A commitment to the empowerment of communities, involving increasing knowledge, skills, consciousness and confidence to become critical, creative and active participants. It leads people and communities to be resilient, organised, included and influential.

Collectivity

A commitment to collectivity. A collective approach requires a focus on the potential benefits for communities rather than focusing only on benefits to individuals. It recognises the rights of communities and groups, including funded organisations, to work autonomously and maintain a critical voice. It involves seeking collective outcomes in pursuit of a just and equal society.

Social Justice

A commitment to social justice including the promotion of policies and practices that challenge injustice and value diversity.

Sustainable Development

A commitment to sustainable development, including the promotion of cultural, environmental, economic and social sustainable policies and practices.

Human Rights, Equality and Anti-discrimination

A commitment to human rights, equality and anti-discrimination, involving the promotion of human rights and equality in society and a commitment to addressing the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by many groups. Specifically, recognising the particular experiences of people in relation to gender based issues and in particular the impact of gender inequality on women (including women from marginalised communities and minority groups) and on society as a whole. The Department is committed to the Public Sector Duty requirement to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect human rights, in our work and in the promotion of the Public Sector Duty in the all policies, strategies and actions developed.

Social Inclusion

A commitment to social inclusion. Prioritising the needs of communities experiencing social or economic exclusion, including rural isolation, and involving recognition that the promotion of social and economic inclusion requires us to recognise and seek to address the root causes of exclusion as well as developing strategies and mechanisms to promote and ensure inclusion.

Principles

Respect

Respect for the diversity of knowledge, skills, views and experiences of communities stakeholders and will seek to maximise the potential that this diversity brings in the development of policies and actions.

Collaboration

A commitment to working collaboratively, engaging with a broad a range of stakeholders to ensure excellence in our work and a well-informed process.

Subsidiarity

A commitment to seek to develop approaches which safeguard the ability of communities, whether communities of interest and geographic communities to influence and, where possible, take decisions and actions, promoting a sharing of power and the exercise of power as close to the communities as possible.

Harmonisation

A commitment to developing approaches which promote harmonisation and the development of common standards of good practice within local development and community development programme, policies and processes throughout the country.

Value for Money

An understanding of the value for money as being the most advantageous combination of cost, quality and sustainability to meet requirements and we will seek to develop strategies and approaches that promote and ensure best value for money.

A Vision for Community Development in Ireland

Consultations with CWI members throughout Ireland in relation to the future of community development have highlighted that the pre-requisites for reaching a clear and appropriate vision for community development in Ireland are recognition of and support and respect for;

- The legitimacy of community work as a professional, inclusive and empowering approach to addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and as a means to bring about positive social change for those who are most marginalised and disadvantaged in the interests of those communities and society as a whole.
- An appropriately autonomous and independent community development infrastructure, supported by a broad range of programmes and resources.
- The importance of mainstreaming gender equality in representative structures and in all policies and programmes developed in recognition of the persistent inequalities experienced by women in Irish society illustrated by a range of factors including; the democratic deficit with significantly lower numbers of women in political and other decision-making arenas, poverty amongst women in particular amongst lone parents and children and the persistence of violence against women.
- The cultural diversity that is now and always has been a part of Irish society and the need for this diversity including as it relates to Travellers and other minority ethnic groups to be targeted and mainstreamed in all community development initiatives and associated policy frameworks.
- The role and responsibility of community work in informing, monitoring and responding to state policy and mobilising communities towards the goal of placing the needs of communities experiencing poverty, disadvantage and inequality at the heart of Government policy.
- The fact that this role will inevitably from time to time bring community work organisations and key decision makers into a process of debate, disagreement and controversy. These processes must be managed responsibly and professionally by all involved with the aim of reaching consensus for the benefit of the communities we are working with. Dissent, mobilisation and controversy are not about an unwillingness to engage, rather a demand for greater engagement on equal terms in the policy making process.
- The importance and legitimacy of supporting and funding quality community work as a means of enhancing our democracy, giving voice to and building the participation of communities experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequality in all aspects of society.
- The need to prevent the reduction of the role of community work to that of service provision only although as outlined above some important services are initiated by community development organisations.

- The fact that devolution of power and decision-making from the state to the people requires an infrastructure of supports in the form of a strong and autonomous community sector support people from the most marginalised communities to participate. ‘An active Community and Voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of de-centralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced for all’^{xiii}.
- The fact that community work requires a particular set of professional skills experience knowledge and professional education and training if it is to continue to make a significant contribution to enhancing democracy, building participative structures, enabling communities, critiquing state policy and practice and ensuring positive outcomes for those who experience poverty, social exclusion and inequality.
- The need to prevent the reduction of community development to the role of assessing and monitoring grants locally rather than the core concerns of empowerment and collective action.
- An acceptance of the inappropriateness of procurement and competitive tendering for community development and social inclusion work.
- The positive duty of state agencies as ‘duty bearers’ in upholding human rights and equality.

Commissioning and Competitive Tendering

CWI is concerned at the policy direction in favour of commissioning and competitive tendering. CWI has published two documents on this issue. At the end of 2015, Community Work Ireland (CWI) published *In Whose Interests, Exploring the Impact of Competitive Tendering and Procurement on Social Inclusion and Community Development in Ireland*. The report traces the evolving move from grants to contract arrangements awarded after competitive tendering processes, and draws on international experience to name and examine the risks associated with this move. In 2017, CWI published the second in this series of reports, exploring the effect of competitive tendering on the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme 2014-2017. This research concluded that community work programmes are incompatible with competitive tendering and calls for the exclusion of such programmes from tendering processes.

It is critical that work to achieve social inclusion and equality is not reduced to service-provision. The advocacy role and the emphasis on participation and empowerment cannot be replaced by a service-delivery model. This should be supported, promoted and encouraged rather than undermined by competitive tendering processes,

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015 the UN General Assembly formally accepted a new set of 17 measurable Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ranging from ending world poverty to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls by 2030. The Statement of Strategy needs to overtly reference the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure that policies and programme include the Irish targets under the SDGs.

Public Sector Duty

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Statement of Strategy 2016-2019 refers to the Public Sector Duty but only housing is identified as the most pertinent aspects of its business to which human rights and equality considerations apply. CWI would encourage the Department of Rural and Community Development to extend this consideration into all aspects of its business.

ⁱ As the Community Worker's Co-operative

ⁱⁱ The Community Platform is a network of 28 of the main national organisations working to address poverty, social exclusion, and inequality. Our objectives are to facilitate solidarity amongst the organisations involved, organise community sector participation in partnership arrangements with the State, and establish a critical voice for equality, rights and anti-poverty interests at a national level.

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.esr.ie/ESR_papers/vol37_3/03%20Larragy.pdf

^{iv} <http://eucdn.net/>

^v <http://www.iacdglobal.org/>

^{vi} <http://enarireland.org/>

^{vii} The Refugee and Migrant Coalition is a group of leading NGOs working with migrants and refugees in Ireland and internationally: ActionAid Ireland, Christian Aid, Community Work Ireland, Comhlámh and others -

<http://www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie/event/refugee-and-migrant-coalition-press-conference>

^{viii}

[http://www.nwci.ie/?/discover/what we do/building the womens movement/convening and chairing womens rights groups/womens human rights alliance](http://www.nwci.ie/?/discover/what_we_do/building_the_womens_movement/convening_and_chairing_womens_rights_groups/womens_human_rights_alliance)

^{ix} www.nwci.ie

^x All Ireland Standards for Community Work - <http://communityworkireland.ie/all-ireland-standards-for-community-work/>

^{xi} *ibid*

^{xii} *ibid*

^{xiii} White paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector

<http://www.environ.ie/en/Community/CommunityVoluntarySupports/>