

***The Community Development Support
Programmes in the BMW Region***

**Position Paper from the BMW Joint Sub-committee on
Employment/Human Resources and Social
Inclusion/Childcare**

November 2003

List of Abbreviations

BMW	Border, Midland and Western
CDP	Community Development Programme
CFG	Core Funded Family and Community Group
CDSPs	Community Development Support Programmes
DCRGA	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
FRC	Family Resource Centre
OP	Operational Programme

1. Introduction

This brief paper is presented by the joint BMW Regional Assembly and Operational Committee sub-committee on Employment/Human Resources and Social Inclusion/Childcare in response to a presentation given to the sub-committee by the Support Agencies for the Community Development Support Programme in the BMW Region on July 11th 2003. The agencies highlighted the work of the programme in the Region and raised a number of issues in relation to the current operational environment and some of the uncertainties surrounding the programme. The sub-committee asked a number of questions relating to the Programme and expressed its concern regarding its insecure funding status and the low level of projects funded in the BMW Region, particularly in the Midlands. This paper outlines the background to the Programme and some of the issues facing it and concludes with a number of recommendations from the Sub-Committee.

2. Background to Community Development Support Programme

The Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs) are comprised of the Community Development Programme (CDP), the Programme of Core funding for Community and Family Support Groups (CFGs) and the Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme. In June 2002 responsibility for the CDP and the CFG Programme was transferred from the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs to the new Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Family Resource Centre (FRC) Programme remained under the Department of Social and Family Affairs and is now managed by the newly established Family Support Agency.

The programme was established in 1990 in recognition of the role in community development in tackling poverty and disadvantage. Projects are given a three-year funding commitment, which provides for core costs such as staff and overheads. It does not cover programme costs, which need to be sourced elsewhere such as other grants or through local resources. The programme aims at mobilising the capacity of disadvantaged communities to participate in mainstream local development, training and education, enterprise and employment opportunities as well as having a strong focus on influencing policy and working for change at regional and national level.

The projects are supported by regional support agencies (of which there are four in the BMW Region), who support and promote good practice in the projects and play an important role in the identification and setting up of new projects.

The following table provides a breakdown of projects in the BMW Region and their corresponding support agencies:

	CDP	FRC	CFG	TOTAL
Border – Hollywell Trust	11	8	3	22
Border – Triskele	7	4	2	13
Midlands – MRSA	6	7	2	15
West – West Training	17	9	4	30
Total BMW	41	28	11	80
National	125	61	48	234

Source: Presentation by Regional Support Agencies to BMW Social Inclusion Sub-committee, 11th July 2003

As can be seen from the above table, the number of projects in the BMW Region is significantly lower in the BMW Region in comparison to the S&E Region, even taking population figures into account. The number of projects in the Midlands is also particularly low.

Projects can be included in the Programme either by application by a local group or through proactive targeting, which is done by the Department in conjunction with the support agencies and a special advisory committee, the Community Development Technical Group, on which the BMW Regional Assembly is represented.

The Community Development Support Programme is not EU co-financed, but is financed solely by the Irish Exchequer by funds made available through the National Lottery. It forms a sub-measure of the Social Inclusion priority of the BMW Regional Operational Programme and the expenditure forecast under the sub-measure for 2000-2006 was €37.18 million. At the mid-term stage (end 2002), actual expenditure was at €15.79 million, which represents 107% of the mid-term target.

3. Evaluation of the Programme – Achievements to Date

The approach of the Centres in working with people and not just on their behalf has a proven track record. People in the community have an active voice in the running of their Centres. This ethos of working with communities in an empowering way, fostering self-development and self-reliance which informs the approach of many family resource centres in carrying out their work is important so that centres can act as a first step to community participation for the most vulnerable and marginalised families

(Min. Noel Ahearn, Launch of Family Resource Centre Forum).

An evaluation of the whole programme was carried out in 2001 by Nexus Research in association with Farrell Grant Sparks Ltd. The purpose of this

evaluation was to assess the impact of the work of the programme, to present the rationale for funding of the CDSP as part of an overall social development and anti-poverty strategy and to make appropriate recommendations. This evaluation came to the conclusion that the programme has contributed very significantly to changing circumstances, developing and mainstreaming new responses to social exclusion and forming partnerships with statutory agencies. A number of important services and resources have been provided through the programme such as training and education, employment supports, rural transport, childcare, youth activities, homework clubs etc. Given that it is a national programme, linked to regional and national structures, there are many opportunities for networking between projects and influencing and forming policy at regional and national levels.

The Fitzpatrick's Mid-Term Evaluation pointed out that the programme has met 61% of its mid-term target in terms of the number of projects funded, although the financial progress currently stands at 107% of the mid-term target. This is possibly due to inflation and unforeseen costs and an over-estimation of the number of projects, which could be funded within the allocated budget. The consultants also pointed out that the programme has only one output indicator, the number of projects funded and no result or impact indicators and suggested that further indicators are needed to provide a better picture of progress.

4. Current Issues Facing the CDSPs

There have been a number of recent changes and new issues in the Programme environment of the CDSPs, which are outlined below:

- The move of the Community Development Projects to the new department and the consequent split of the programme into two separate Government departments. This has meant that there are two separate departments funding and monitoring different aspects of the programme (CDPs and FRCs) and the need for the support agencies to report to two departments. This has caused some confusion in the administration of the programme, both for the support agencies and the projects being funded. The CDPs under the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA) appear to be in a more precarious position regarding funding than the FRCs under the Department of Social and Family Affairs;
- There is currently a review being undertaken in the DCRGA of all community development programmes under its remit with a view to rationalisation and greater co-ordination. It is not sure what the outcome of this review will be and what will be the future of the projects and the support agencies. The Fitzpatrick's Mid-Term Evaluation of the BMW O.P. also made a recommendation of amalgamating the CDSP and the Local Development Programme (administered through the Area Based Partnerships). Whilst greater co-ordination is to be welcomed, this raised some concern about the separate nature of the programmes and the fact that the projects under the CDSP provide

local resource centres managed by a local voluntary committee and the Local Development Programme is mostly provided on an outreach basis from area-based offices, not necessarily located in the locality. Concern was also raised in the recent evaluation of the social inclusion co-ordinating mechanisms of the County Development Boards about the lack of co-ordination at central departmental level in relation to social inclusion measures;

- The level of awareness and profile of the programme is not very high and there is a need to make more people aware of the work that they do;
- All projects are managed by a local voluntary committee and it is becoming increasingly difficult to find new volunteers and to maintain existing ones;
- Whilst a number of local, regional and national evaluations of the programme or elements have taken place, the reporting of the programme by the relevant departments has been noted as being weak in the Fitzpatrick's evaluation and there is a need to develop impact indicators, which provide information on the longer-term impacts of the project and not simply output indicators, which simply recount the number of projects funded. The development of such indicators might help to raise the profile of the programme and prove the need at central government level to fully resource the programme;
- There are a number of budgetary and other constraints, which are leading to uncertainty and hardship for a number of projects. Pre-development work was commenced with a number of projects in the BMW Region over the last two years and the DCRGA is not in a position to make any decision regarding the outcome of funding for those projects. Many volunteers have given up their time over one or two years with no certainty as to whether their project has any chance of receiving funding. The meetings of the Community Development Technical Group which decide on funding for new projects has also been suspended as there are currently no new decisions on funding being made. The application process has also been closed and the Department's website states that they are taking no new applications.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the above, it can be concluded that the CDSPs are currently in a state of uncertainty, which has potential negative impacts on the work of the projects currently being funded and puts projects waiting for funding approval in a state of ambiguity. The National Evaluation and other reports have highlighted the impressive work to date of the programmes in combating poverty and disadvantage and involving local communities. The BMW Social Inclusion sub-committee is concerned about the current ambiguity surrounding the programme and the potential negative impact on new and existing projects and makes the following recommendations:

- Funding for the programme should not be cut and all projects in the pre-development phase should be given a guarantee that their projects can be included in the programme, provided they meet the requisite criteria.
- The Committee is concerned about the low number of projects in the BMW Region, in comparison to the S&E Region and highlighted that there is greater poverty and disadvantage in the BMW Region and that more areas should be targeted for such projects. This is a particular concern for the Midlands Region.
- In line with the recommendations made by Fitzpatrick and Associates in the Mid-Term Evaluation, more work should be done on the development of impact indicators for the programme.
- The Committee is concerned about the implications of the separation of the Programme into two different Government Departments, which has caused a considerable amount of confusion. The Committee feels that the programme should have remained within the remit of one department and failing that mechanisms should be put in place to ensure greater co-ordination between the various aspects of the programme. This should also apply to the reporting of the measures for the BMW O.P. progress reports, which often report on the measures separately, thus causing confusion.
- The Committee welcomes the review currently being carried out of programmes under the remit of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and whilst it is of utmost importance to ensure co-ordination and non-duplication of community programmes, it is equally important to ensure that communities do not suffer undue disadvantage as a result of any restructuring that may arise and that areas suffering from deprivation and social exclusion continue to receive the support and resources that they require to break the cycle of disadvantage.

The Committee therefore urges the relevant departments to take these points into consideration in any changes it is considering to the Programme and to continue to properly resource both existing and new projects.

REFERENCES

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