

# **Green Party Community Development Policy**



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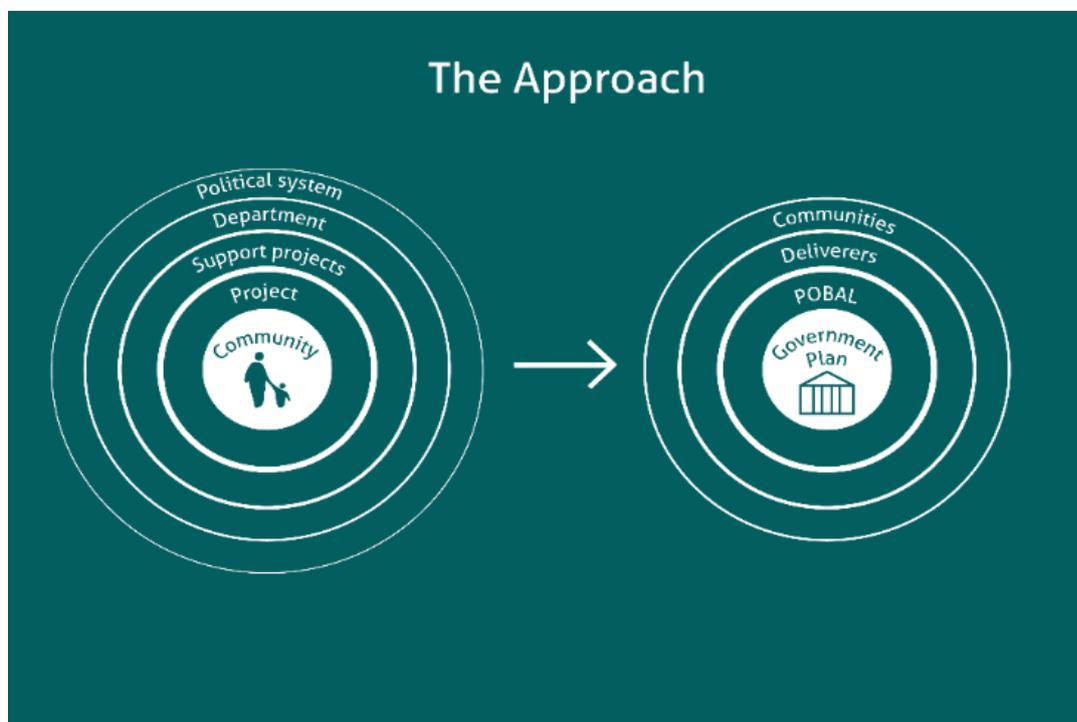
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## 1.0 SUMMARY

The Irish Government has supported two approaches to community development since 1990. One has a local focus and the other a central focus. In broad terms the approaches look like this:

LOCAL	CENTRALISED
Needs are experienced and identified locally (People know the territory)	Needs are defined centrally (through research and mapping)
Local control and decision-making	Central control and decision-making
Planned and Emergent outcomes	Prescribed outcomes
Primary Accountability is to Local Community	Primary Accountability is to “the taxpayer”
This approach emphasises Ownership, Relationships and Engagement	This one emphasises efficient delivery, reports and quantification
This approach is dynamic and can be messy	This approach is linear and standardised

Over the past 10 to 15 years, a **major imbalance** has developed in Government-supported community development such that the more local and community centred approach in the left-hand column has been effectively obliterated in favour of the more centralised and prescriptive approach in the right-hand column. We have moved from:



In our view the reason for this shift is a confluence of political fear and expediency together with an administrative desire for control and tidiness. However, the shift is to the detriment of the best that community development has to offer. It shows a clear preference for delivery over involvement and engagement.

The thrust of this new Green Party policy on Government support for community development is to redress this imbalance.

## 2.0 Introduction

There are many definitions of community development with significant overlap between all of them. The following definition is from the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), and chosen because it is wide ranging and comprehensive:

“Community development is a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy. It seeks the empowerment of local communities, taken to mean both geographical communities, communities of interest or identity and communities organising around specific themes or policy initiatives. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organisations and networks; and the capacity of institutions and agencies (public, private and non-governmental) to work in dialogue with citizens to shape and determine change in their communities. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. It has a set of core values/social principles covering human rights, social inclusion, equality and respect for diversity; and a specific skills and knowledge base.

“Good community development is action that helps people to recognise and develop their ability and potential and organise themselves to respond to problems and needs which they share. It supports the establishment of strong communities that control and use assets to promote social justice and help improve the quality of community life. It also enables community and public agencies to work together to improve the quality of government.” (SCDC)

## 3.0 Overview

In Ireland, from 1990 onwards, the focus of Government support for community development was that of tackling the problems of poverty and disadvantage. There were two approaches operating side by side. The first was the people-centred approach as practiced in the Community Development Programme from 1990 to 2010. It set out to improve the capacity of local communities. Local resource centres were put in place and managed by local people. The Government invested in building up a local leadership and provided support and training so that they might be effective within their communities. Local personnel took action on a wide range of local issues: equality and discrimination issues were highlighted; women’s groups were formed; opportunities for volunteering were provided. Local needs were addressed such as lone parent issues, domestic violence, crime and justice, health, elderly persons, special needs, substance abuse, housing and accommodation, childcare initiatives, after school care, environment, supervised access, amenities and facilities, and many more. In the words of Brian Harvey, a well-respected social researcher:

*“The programme became recognised as a European flagship. What was done in Ireland ...was advertised, rightly, as the leading, cutting edge of community development and anti-poverty work throughout the European Union.” Brian Harvey*

The second approach as practiced in local area Partnerships and other related programmes was more product-centred in nature. The focus was more on services, and efficient delivery of these services. Numbers and measurable outcomes become very prominent.

While the latter approach concentrates on doing things to and for people, the people-centred approach to community development is about doing things with people. It is about developing a respectful relationship with people which enables them to participate as fully as possible in their own development and that of their community. It is about people taking a growing level of responsibility for that development. Often the distinction can be expressed as working directly and in partnership with people in order that they may improve their world as opposed to product development which works on the externals of their world with a view to improving their lot.

It is not always helpful to create a polarity between the two approaches as so often happens. Both have a validity and a practical usefulness in appropriate contexts. Indeed, most development interventions contain some elements of both approaches. What differs from one intervention to another is the context in which the intervention is happening and the proportions in which the two approaches are applied.

Since 2002, a major imbalance has developed in Government-supported community development in Ireland such that the more local and people-centred approach has been effectively obliterated in favour of a more centralised and prescriptive approach. The requirement for communities to fit into the prescribed Government plan was delivered with procrustean<sup>1</sup> determination. This all came about despite consistent favourable reports as to the value of the people-centred approach. Indeed, the Government itself strongly endorsed that approach in its own White Paper:

“In the Government’s vision of society the ability of the Community and Voluntary sector to provide channels for the active involvement and participation of citizens is fundamental. An active Community and Voluntary sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced for all.

This is a key point. The Government regards statutory support of the Community and Voluntary sector as having an importance to the wellbeing of our society that goes beyond utilitarian concerns to do with ‘purchase’ of services by this or that statutory agency. It has to do with the nature of the society we wish to foster one which fosters active participation in its affairs by individuals, because such participation is vital to our democratic way of life. The Government’s vision of society is also one which actively encourages people as individuals and as members of groups to look after their own needs very often in partnership with statutory agencies but without depending on the State to meet all needs.” (Supporting Voluntary Activity, Govt. White Paper, 2000.)

By 2010, the obliteration of the people-centred approach was complete. In that year the community development projects were transferred into the Local Community Development Programme and then into the local authorities on 1st July 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Procrustes was a Greek mythological figure, sometimes presented as an innkeeper. He had an iron bed on which he compelled his visitors to lie. Here, if a victim was shorter than the bed, he stretched him by hammering or racking the body to fit. Alternatively, if the victim was longer than the bed, he cut off his legs to make the body fit the bed’s length. The need to fit in was of ultimate importance.

Later, in 2015, this new programme, called Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) was put out to commercial tender. So, to recap, we started in 1990 with community development projects whose communities were at the centre of the process. 27 years later we have SICAP in which private companies are tendering to deliver services into the communities with the Government having taken back complete control. A recent ESRI study of the SICAP programme is broadly supportive of our critique. See below.

The Green Party draft policy document is significantly bolstered by a recent ESRI report, titled: THE GOALS AND GOVERNANCE OF THE SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVATION PROGRAMME (SICAP) 2015-2017. The ESRI study aims to inform policy on two levels by looking at the overarching strategic goals and objectives of SICAP, and by assessing the operation of the SICAP governance structure. Like our own draft policy document, it acknowledges that the SICAP programme is not without merit, while identifying many weaknesses. I choose three of them here.

1. A dominant issue raised by the research was the need for a broader conception of community development to be embedded in the programme.

The authors say:

'The programme was seen as adopting a relatively narrow conception of community development. SICAP was seen by many as overly emphasising 'activation' with measures of community activity more narrowly framed in terms of number of interactions with community groups. This approach was seen ... as inadequately capturing important work around long-term community engagement and interagency collaboration'. (p.146)

Also:

The interviewees highlighted the importance for community development to adopt a bottom-up approach to identifying and addressing local need. However, many Programme Implementers reported that the move towards a top-down approach under SICAP had fundamentally changed the dynamic away from one of partnership towards one of service delivery'. (p. 134)

2. The ESRI authors note the tendency to centralise control and argue for a broader and more balanced conception of community development with more control devolved to the local level.

'It is worth noting that in Ireland the system of government is highly centralised and policy design takes place mainly at the national level. At the same time, policy and practice is often targeted and delivered at the local or community level (Lynam, 2006). Policymaking in Ireland has increasingly acknowledged the importance of community development in combating poverty and social exclusion (Motherway, 2006). According to the definition put forward by the Combat Poverty Agency (2000), community development is about people working collectively for social change which will improve the quality of their lives, the communities in which they live and/or the society of which they are a part.

'Community development is seen as a multi-dimensional concept, including dimensions such as personal, community and public policy and attaching equal importance to the process (how something is achieved) and outcome (what is achieved) (ibid.). In addition, at its core, community development is about participation, empowerment and collective action for social change (Motherway, 2006). This approach is argued to have many potential benefits, including empowerment and improved participation, better programmes and outcomes through the involvement of communities, and a community-specific, flexible focus.' (pp. 12 – 13)

Sample quotes from interviewees:

*'I think it's very much centralised now within the local government structure and I think, ideologically, that is wrong because I think it is always the part of civil society and civil society should live side by side with a local authority, with local government and not be governed or owned by it (national policy stakeholder)'.(p.31)*

*'SICAP's a blunt instrument because ... it was written centrally in Dublin and just applied to every county as if every county had the exact same situation on the ground'.(p. 58)*

3. The authors also challenge the lack of balance between quantitative and qualitative reporting requirements in the SICAP programme. In their Press Release they note 'the requirement to meet throughput numbers on the programme meant there was not enough emphasis on more in-depth engagement'. They go on to say:

'Most case-study areas expressed criticism about the emphasis on quantitative as opposed to qualitative reporting and the focus on numbers and targets'.

Quoting from one of many interviewees:

'It's because of the level of focus that's on numbers and targets, it's purely about numbers. You rarely actually hear a mention of a target group member. It's about 700 here and 200 there and why haven't you -- and then the Sword of Damocles hanging over the local development company financially is just one of the most ridiculous things ever, because this is a social programme, it's not a commercial programme.' (Staff, Heriot p. 67)

The Green Party draft policy document proposes a balanced approach to community development which deals with the above and other issues highlighted in the ESRI report.

#### 4.0 Proposal for Development

Before outlining the Principles which will apply to a new programme and the Actions which we propose, it is necessary to comment on a few issues:

- Over the past number of years there has been a growing concentration on issues relating to governance and accountability within community programmes. While not at all discounting the importance of governance and accounting, they relate to the form (the structures and processes put in place to achieve a purpose) of the programme and have value only when the function (the purpose for which the programme exists) of the programme is clear and understood and agreed by all stakeholders.
- There also has been a question as to how change has been viewed. Projectable change is the kind of planned, linear, goal-oriented change which often finds expression in work plans. It sets targets and breaks these down into doable steps and sequences. It is perhaps the primary way of thinking about planning. Projectable change is good but alone is inadequate. In our experience change can also be "emergent" or "transformative".<sup>2</sup> Community development programme funders would do well to take account of this wider view as to how desirable change comes about.

<sup>2</sup> **Emergent change** describes the day-to-day unfolding of life, adaptive and uneven processes of unconscious and conscious learning from experience and the change that results from that.

Crisis or stuckness sets the stage for transformative change. Unlike emergent change, which is characterised as a learning process, **transformative change** is more about unlearning, of freeing the social being from those relationships and identities, inner and outer, which underpin the crisis and hold back resolution and further healthy development

- Two distinct organisational cultures have co-existed within community programmes in which public servants and community practitioners work side by side. Little attempt has been made to acknowledge or positively manage the tension which this creates. These differing cultures became manifest in approaches to decision making, in extent of information sharing, in understanding the function of community development and in a range of small ways in which public servants and community practitioners have had their own distinct cultural conditioning. It is difficult to see a successful community development programme emerging unless serious attention is given to this issue.
- Since learning is central to the community development process, this work would be greatly enriched if due attention is given to translating learnings on the ground into policy at a wider level. For this to happen all the stakeholders need to be committed to reflection on their work and this aspect will need to be supported and resourced.
- Work is underway in developing a new National Framework Policy on Local and Community Development. This work is welcome but its limitation is noted. It is based on a continuation of the product-centred structures that now dominate and does not challenge the structural changes required to redress the imbalance which has been featured in this document.

## **5.0 Vision**

The Green Party envisions a strong, autonomous Community sector in Ireland that is able to contribute in an ecologically and socially sustainable way, to enhance the social, environmental, cultural, physical, spiritual and economic wellbeing of its citizens. We envisage national and local government playing a constructive, enabling role and that the sector is genuinely respected for its contribution.

## **6.0 Principles which will Apply**

The Green Party will apply the following principles in determining and prioritising community development actions to be supported by Government:

- Primary attention will be given to social justice issues, such as supporting anti-poverty work and to work with people experiencing disadvantage.
- The same people centred approach to development would apply in the promotion of new community energy, food, nature conservation, educational and enterprise support projects.
- The two approaches, people-centred and product-centred, outlined above will be supported in a more balanced way than what pertains at present
- Every effort will be made to maximise the people centred approach so that over time there is reduced need for the product-centred approach. The added value of this approach, particularly relating to volunteer involvement and leadership development will be acknowledged and supported.
- In our policy the function of each programme will always be clarified prior to decisions being taken relating to the form.
- Our policy is to encourage and promote desirable change in all its forms, projectible, emergent and transformative.

- Our policy will be to deal with the issue of differing organisational cultures in an open and transparent way which is respectful of both cultures.
- Our policy will be to develop a people-centred programme which, in its structures, processes and decision-making, models that which is expected from community organisations participating.
- Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and accounting systems which are congruent with the function of the programme and focussed on learning will be applied.

## 7.0 Actions

We are aware that Government is committed to a five-year SICAP programme (up to 2022) and that it is presently engaged in a process, albeit inadequate, to develop a new framework for supporting community development activity. In the light of this, the Green Party will seek to grow a people-centred and community-centred programme over the next four years, towards the end of which, it will commit to a thorough, independent review of how best to support community development activity, and of how the relationship between Government and Community and Voluntary sector might be developed and enriched. So, in the shorter term, it will:

- Seek to increase Government financial support for community development programmes and initiatives to more adequate levels.
- Continue to support existing programmes, e.g. SICAP, to which the present Government is committed to 2022.
- Begin growing and core funding a new programme for community development. The programme would provide support to organisations that are already engaged, or, have well-developed ideas about becoming engaged, in their communities, or across communities on specific issues. This new programme will have two elements:
  - Primary attention will be given to social justice issues, such as supporting anti-poverty work and to work with people experiencing disadvantage.
  - Support for developing other types of activity, social, political, economic, environmental, etc., in which the concept of community may make a positive contribution. As an example, schemes developing environmentally-friendly sources of energy at a community level might require some financial support in the early stages of their development.
- Provide support for these projects through a small number of support agencies providing technical support and training in community development approaches.
- Develop mechanisms by which learning from the work becomes a key ingredient of policy development.
- Put in place an administrative unit for the programme with expertise in people-centred approaches. Any idea of administering such an innovative programme using present structures, which are designed to deliver prescribed outcomes, would inevitably generate problems.
- Commit to a thorough independent review of all Government support for community development towards the end of the four-year period with a view to providing well-balanced support going forward. The review will also examine the development of a

framework for a new and respectful relationship between the wider Community and Voluntary sector and the Government.

## 8.0 Costings

### Community Development Projects (average)

2 Staff (including Employer PRSI)	80,000
Overheads (Rent, telephone, audit, light, heat, sundries, insurance)	16,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>96,000</b>

### Support Agency

3 Staff (including Emp. PRSI)	130,000
Overheads (Rent, telephone, audit, light, heat, sundries, insurance)	25,000
Travel, Accommodation and Sustenance	40,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>195,000</b>

### Admin Unit

5 Staff (including Emp. PRSI)	215,000
Other Costs	35,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>250,000</b>

### Overall Costs

<b>Annual Costs</b>	<b>€</b>
50 Community Projects x 96,000 (average)	4,800,000
4 Support Agencies x 195,000	780,000
1 Admin Unit	250,000
1 Training Programme Development	150,000
<b>Total per annum</b>	<b>5,980,000</b>
<b>4-year Cost</b>	<b>23,920,000</b>