



Extracts from Address

by

Seamus Brennan T.D.

Minister for Social Affairs

at the launch of

Combat Poverty Agency

Report

**“TACKLING POVERTY AND PROMOTING  
SOCIAL INCLUSION”**

***Linking National and Local Structures***

Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> February 2007

In

Gresham Hotel, Dublin

at 2.30 p.m.



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

---

I can assure you that tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion is now at the very heart of Government policy. Next week we will be launching Ireland's new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. That ten-year plan will clearly outline our vision and objectives for tackling poverty and social exclusion up to 2016. And, of course, last month the Government launched the National Development Plan, which for the first time contained a dedicated section on social inclusion. Over the period 2007-2013, some €183 billion has been allocated - with almost €50 billion of this identified for social inclusion measures. This is in addition to the €21 billion for social and affordable housing measures, €5 billion on health infrastructure and €18 billion on education.

A small number of high-level goals have been identified in both the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the NDP, to ensure that a decisive impact on poverty is made. These high level goals, along with some 150-targeted actions and interventions set out in the NAPinclusion, are designed to mobilise resources to address long-standing and serious social deficits. Another important feature of both the NDP and the NAPinclusion is a focus on strengthening delivery and a number of specific actions have been identified to develop more coherent and cross-cutting approaches.

The combined effect of the two Plans will result in a greater impact being made on poverty over a 10-year period than in any comparable period in our history.

Our economic success over the past ten years means that we now can devote much greater resources in real terms to poverty alleviation than in the past, without endangering economic growth and development.

The experience of the last 10 years under the first NAPS shows what can be achieved when a clear strategic approach is adopted, backed by a strong



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

---

Government commitment and the necessary resources. For example, since 1997 some 250,000 people, including 100,000 children, have been lifted out of deprivation and hardship as a result of concentrated and targeted measures and supports. The consistent poverty rate, calculated using EU-SILC, has been reduced from 8.8% in 2003 to 7.0% in 2005.

As you know Budget 2007 delivered the largest increase in Social Welfare spending in the history of the State. Payment rate increases were almost three times the expected rate of inflation. Social Welfare expenditure has increased substantially since 1997 when spending was €5.7 billion and has doubled since as recently as 2001 to €15.3 billion in 2007. Budget 2007 increased the lowest level of Social Welfare payments by an unprecedented €20 a week to a new level of €185.80. It is well established that the best route out of poverty and social exclusion is employment. We now have an unemployment rate of just 4.8%-one of the lowest in the EU- while long term unemployment now stands at 1.3%. Between 1997 and 2005 the number of persons classified as unemployed fell by almost 40% from about 171,000 to 105,000, a massive reduction of 66,000 persons. Right now, there are now more than 2 million people in employment compared with just under 1.5 million in 1997.

We have travelled some distance towards along the road towards eradicating remaining poverty levels. I am confident that progress on an even greater scale will be achieved over the next ten years in the period up to 2016. The plans are in place and the resources are pledged. However, to a great extent the most important work remains to be done and that is implementation. We owe it to those who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion and to the taxpayers providing the resources to achieve effective implementation and value for money. This has to be a major priority over the coming years. And that is why this report



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

---

from the Combat Poverty Agency is timely as it deals with a key aspect of implementation, the better integration of national and local structures

As you know, the Social Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016* addresses these issues. It provides for the development of a new lifecycle framework within which to address key social challenges. This involves assessing the risks and hazards which the individual person faces and the supports they require at each stage of the life cycle, as Children, People of Working Age, Older People, and for many, as People with Disabilities. The Agreement recognises that a key element in achieving its social inclusion goals is effective delivery of services at both national and local levels.

The emphasis which the Agreement places on supporting the local to national links has already been taken fully into account in the new National Development Plan and through the commitment made to continue to support and develop the work of the County/City Development Boards.

We are fortunate that there are already coordinating structures in place which have served us well at both national and local levels:

- The Cabinet Committee on social inclusion operates at the highest level.
- The key structures at the local level are the County/City Development Boards and their Social Inclusion Measures Groups.
- The social inclusion units in local authorities, which is set to double over next two years

The Report and the CPA policy statement effectively point to the need for more streamlined coordination of services and institutional structures to promote social inclusion at local level.



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

---

Key points include recommending a pivotal role for the Development Boards in promoting and facilitating this coordination. And, of course, the support of Government Departments and national agencies for the CDBs, will be critically important in achieving this objective.

In this context I note that it is recommended that the national and local linkages should be achieved by a National Implementation Group, again via the Development Boards at local level. In addition the report recommends that local authorities should have a key role in tackling social exclusion both in relation to their leadership of the Boards and in implementing the recommendation of local authorities producing a local Social Inclusion Strategy.

I can assure you that careful consideration will be given to these important recommendations. The Report and the policy statement clearly identify the issues and the challenges. They put forward well thought through recommendations on how these might be addressed which will make the task of achieving consensus easier.

I am particularly pleased that it has been possible for so many County and City Managers to be present today. I know that the report, policy statement and recommendations will be of particular interest to you. I also know that with your support and commitment much can be achieved in developing greater integration at local level, and between local and national levels, to get better social inclusion outcomes. As Minister with responsibility for social inclusion, I can assure you of a similar commitment at national level to achieving that goal.

**ENDS**