

MAY2011

UPDATED TO REFLECT NEW FRAMEWORK

Local and Community Development Programme



**A step by
step guide to
Strategic
Planning for
LCDP**

Step One - Reflection on the principles of the programme and the horizontal priorities of the NDP and principles of the programme.



The LCDP is built upon a number of core values of Community Development which advocates participation, empowerment, social justice and equality for those who are marginalised. To express these core values a set of programme principles have been developed. These are:

- Prioritise marginalised people and social groupings within the most disadvantaged communities, targeting those furthest from access to education, training and employment, and those at highest risk of social exclusion;
- Promote active and constructive engagement between the State and communities about the development and enactment of public policy priorities at local level; and
- Foster integrative and coordinated work in communities by bringing together people, groups, agencies, voluntary and statutory bodies to make a positive difference to endemic or temporary social problems and issues.

It is important that the strategic plan developed can translate the core values and principles of the programme into a local context. In addition to these principles the National Development Plan identifies horizontal priorities for the period 2007 – 2013. These are:

- Social Inclusion (of which the LCDP is a key contributor to);
- Gender Equality;
- Environmental Sustainability;
- The Development of the Rural Economy; and
- Balanced Regional Development.

Before any planning has begun, it is important to reflect on the principles of the programme along with horizontal priorities of the NDP and identify how these will be embedded throughout the planning process.

Some useful questions to reflect on may be:

- How will the principles of the programme be reflected in the development of a strategic plan?
- How can the core values, principles and horizontal themes, be reflected in the organisations procedures and actions?
- How will policies, procedures and actions be monitored on a regular basis to ensure that they continue to reflect the above?

Step 2 - Agree the strategic planning process, timescale, and allocate resources



It is key that a 'plan' for the plan is agreed from the outset. It is preferable that responsibility is not left in the hands of one individual staff member. The Board and staff must fully participate in the process. Avoid making the process too complicated or too long. Be realistic in terms of the resources that can be allocated to it and ensure that clear terms of reference are developed. Consider the following:

- How long is needed?
- What resources are required?
- Who will be involved?
- How will they be involved?
- Who will take responsibility for managing the planning process?
- How will all of the information gathered be consolidated into a plan?
- How will consultation expectations be managed?

- What type of a disputes resolution mechanism will be put in place for stakeholders involved in the process?

Clear terms of reference will need to be agreed to ensure that the process stays focused on the outcome of translating the national programme into a series of local actions. Terms of reference should include:

- The aim of the strategic planning process (why is this being undertaken and you hope to achieve);
- The objectives of the strategic planning process (how the aims will be achieved);
- Key tasks that need to be undertaken;
- Who is responsible for each action and how progress will be made;
- Stakeholders to be involved;
- How stakeholders will be informed;
- How will stakeholder disputes be dealt with;
- Resources required; and
- Clear reporting mechanisms and timeframes for each stage.

Who to Consult with – Programme Requirements

Consultation should be undertaken where appropriate with the following stakeholders:

Consultation Requirements	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community groups or organisations previously involved in the coordination of the Community Development Programme • RAPID Area Implementation Teams • Groups/ organisations representing/ working with the needs of communities and beneficiary groups identified as at the greatest risk of social exclusion • Youth service providers • HSE relevant services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National bodies representing the interests of beneficiary groups, as appropriate • FAS & LES • VEC • Third Level Institutions where present • County Childcare Committees • Employers Groups • Trade Unions (where relevant) • County Development Boards*

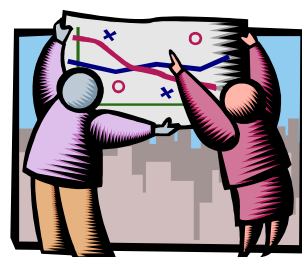
* Please note that in addition to consultation, strategic plans developed also need to be endorsed by County Development Boards

The above groups will need to be taken account of when planning consultation processes (see also step 5 on meaningful consultation)

Step 3 - Analysis of Area Profile

This section of the plan provides an opportunity for the LDC to analyse the area in which it is operating. It is key that this work is thorough, as many decisions on the strategic direction of work and associated responses will be based on it.

This step should give a picture of the area as it is in 2011 from a social inclusion and poverty perspective by providing information and analysis of the socio-economic, demographic and service provision profile of the LDC's catchment area. The profile will focus attention on places and beneficiary groups within the area where the greatest levels of social exclusion and poverty are experienced. It should describe the current position under each heading, highlight significant changes that have occurred, analyse the impact of these changes and, as an outcome of the analysis, summarise the key critical conclusions that create the rationale for identifying future priorities. The profile will include:



1. A Socio-economic profile of the area providing details of existing industries, services, agriculture and land use, tourism, and the main social, cultural, environmental activities;
2. A Demographic profile of the area providing information on beneficiary groups and those at greatest risk of poverty and social exclusion. To undertake a demographic profile, LDCs are requested to utilise Pobal small area maps as well as other demographic information that is locally available (number of medical card holders in particular areas, Department of Social Protection information on live register, levels of early school leaving etc). Remember in order to make decisions about who will be targeted in your area, you will need to do some analysis on each beneficiary group of the programme;
3. A profile of statutory and community sector service provision. The service provision profile could include the following five elements:
 - i) An outline and analysis of mainstream statutory services ;
 - ii) An outline of other specialist programmes i.e. LES, Rural Social Scheme, EU Initiatives etc;
 - iii) An outline of community or voluntary provided services (other than programmes listed under item ii)
 - iv) An outline of community development infrastructure/activity i.e. FRCs, community platforms, networks, issue based groups etc;
 - v) A description and comment on key co-ordinating structures i.e. CDBs, SIM, Rapid AITs, County Childcare Committees etc;
4. A summary of conclusions from the analysis of the area profile. This element of the plan provides a space and opportunity to bring together key conclusions from the analysis. It will establish an overall picture of unmet needs, possible opportunities and an evidence-base for devising proposed priorities. The outcome of the analysis should result in a clearly informed basis for internal review, consultation and subsequent objectives.

Step 4 - Analysis of the organisation and its external environment

The next stage of the plan will be informed by the previous stage and will also generate new information to further support the shaping of local objectives. Once a current profile of the area has been generated it is important to undertake an internal review to assess the LDC itself.



This is often undertaken using a process known as SWOT analysis. SWOT is an acronym for identifying and analysing the **S**trengths and **W**eaknesses of an organisation along with identifying and analysing the **O**pportunities and **T**hreats that are found outside of the organisation in the wider economic, social, and political environment. Discussions should allow for an honest and open discussion amongst staff and board members.

An examination of internal strengths and weaknesses involves asking questions such as:

- What does the organisation expect to achieve through the LCDP?
- What has been achieved through previous social inclusion work?
- What social inclusion impact has the organisation had?
- Is everyone clear about their roles and responsibilities, particularly in the context of programme changes?
- Is everyone aware of the different structures operating within the organization?
- Are staff, boards and sub-committee members aware of the principles, aims and objectives of the programme?
- Is there an even balance of participation amongst all the partners?
- Does the organisation's work reflect the principles of the programme?

An examination of the opportunities and threats that could effect an organisation includes asking questions such as:

- What are the demographic changes in the areas? It is important to identify the groups and areas that are the most disadvantaged in the catchment areas, and to ensure that the situation of the named beneficiary groups is assessed and appropriate responses developed.
- What effects have the wider social and economic trends had on the organisation?
- How has political/policy change affected our work?
- What opportunities exist for new services and actions?
- What opportunities exist for strengthening local partnerships?
- What opportunities exist for mainstreaming?
- What opportunities exist for additional income and resources?

Not everyone will agree with each other when carrying out a SWOT analysis, and at this stage it is important to ensure that the Board of Directors agrees with key elements in the analysis. It may be useful to undertake a SWOT analysis in the context of each of the four goals of the programme and a separate analysis on management and structures. It may also be useful to come back to this stage once external consultation has been undertaken as consultation may generate more information or highlight a particular strength or weakness that was not anticipated.



Step 5 - Undertake consultation with key stakeholders

The next stage in undertaking a strategic planning process is to involve key stakeholders in the planning process. The development of an area profile along with the internal review will provide information on which to base consultation. The new programme framework which renews the emphasis on targeting those who are at greatest risk of social exclusion will necessitate meaningful consultation with appropriate stakeholders. Consultation with beneficiary groups and communities is a clearly identified criteria for strategic plan assessment. In order that programme guidelines are enacted, consultation processes will utilise community development principles of participation, empowerment and appropriate decision making in a structured and coordinated way.

The following steps are outlined to ensure the process of consultation is undertaken in an open and productive manner:

Consultation Process Steps

1. As outlined in step two, a clear plan of how strategic planning will be undertaken will be developed.
2. Again as outlined in step two, key terms of reference may need to be developed for all stakeholders to ensure the process is clear and transparent and show how consultation will feed into the strategic planning process. This may involve the establishment of planning sub-committees for particular communities or themes to feedback to main planning processes.
3. Identification of appropriate methods of consultation are dependent on beneficiary group/ community requirements. The following are some points to consider in developing meaningful consultation processes:
 - Scheduling meetings at times at which beneficiary groups could attend;
 - Linking meetings to public transport schedules or providing alternative transport;
 - Ensuring clear accessible information is provided;
 - Providing interpretation facilities if required;
 - Providing a contribution for child and dependent care;
 - Using the strategic plan process to publicise the work of the organisation and raise awareness;

- Making the strategic planning process relevant to people's key concerns;
 - Trying to make events fun and creative and not too formal and stuffy; and
 - Ensuring that all workshops were participative and interactive.
4. Time should be given to understand the current situation and needs of each stakeholder. At this stage it may be useful to share the findings of analysis of the area along with internal review findings with stakeholders. It is sometimes useful to use a SWOT exercise here also.
 5. Focus should then move to agreeing an approach for planning of objectives and strategies under each goal. Any changes to current practice will be based upon the achievement of better targeting of disadvantage, increased synergy, better coordination and the reduction of duplication.
 6. Consultation processes will be led by LDCs but should allow for balanced and equal input by stakeholders as appropriate.
 7. Clear criteria for the prioritisation of issues and resource allocation should be made clear at the outset.
 8. Feedback will be provided to stakeholders involved in the strategic planning process identifying how their issues and concerns have been taken into account.
 9. Consultation is one key element of meaningful participation with stakeholders. It is important to also develop systems for review and feedback to stakeholders and to develop a strategy for on-going participation of beneficiary groups in the monitoring of strategic plans.
 10. Finally it is important to remember that consultation should only be used when there is a clear benefit to the stakeholders. Consultation is useless, even detrimental unless LDCs are prepared to use the results as part of decision making processes.

Methods of Consultation

The following methods are often identified as ways to involve stakeholders:

- Involving stakeholders in the management of the process – through planning committee or through Board of Directors;
- Stakeholder workshops with a number of different groups or involving specific sectors on their own;
- Consulting stakeholder representatives on the board or sub-committees;
- Questionnaires;
- One-to-one Interviews;
- Small focus group interview;
- Phone surveys;
- Reviewing written documentation, minutes, research and previous evaluations;
- Advertisements in local papers/ radio for written submissions;
- Developing briefing papers or discussion documents for advance circulation; and
- Website/ Discussion Fora etc.

Some suggested good practice approaches highlighted in a Pobal/ADM case study on strategic review were as follows:

- ✓ Review of internal documentation and research were strengthened by the use of additional mechanisms that gave an opportunity for people to give direct feedback.
- ✓ It is important to ensure that people do not suffer from consultation or meeting burnout and that all events are focused and had a clear result for participants.
- ✓ Calls for written submissions had a very low response rate and needed to be supported with another approach.

- ✓ Questionnaires and surveys were beneficial where they are carefully designed and widely circulated. Unfortunately postal questionnaires can have a low response rate and to address this some organisations offered a prize draw for completed forms. Online survey tools such as Survey Monkey might be useful in this process and at times have a more direct response rate particularly if trying to gauge opinion of local organisations.
- ✓ Focus groups and workshops were effective where they were well planned and recorded. Where possible the use of independent third party facilitators was useful where there was a danger that staff/ management felt that they had to answer all concerns immediately or defend a programme of work.
- ✓ It is important that workshops were encouraged to name and value achievements and challenges as well as difficulties in the past. Workshops were specially planned so that this could be facilitated.
- ✓ A planning process facilitates many voices, and it is unlikely that these will agree all the time. The organisation needs to be aware that differences will emerge and resist the temptation to strive for consensus at early stages.
- ✓ Many organisations prepared discussion or briefing papers in advance of workshops. These were usually prepared by senior staff and often included items such as key achievements and difficulties, key lessons from the previous period and key conclusions from sub-groups involved.
- ✓ Where available individual project evaluations and participant feedback were summarised and circulated
- ✓ Some organisations wished to survey past project participants. In these cases it was important that a relatively short time passed since the completion of the project, as there was a danger that people had moved, and/or had lost interest in the topic.

Step 6 - Identify and agree a series of local objective statements that will meet Programme outcomes of the programme. Agree strategies to meet objectives.



Having undertaken an analysis of the area, an internal review and consultation with key stakeholders, the next stage of the planning process is to link local needs, issues and priorities to the National objectives and outcomes of the Programme. It may be useful to address the following questions:

- Has the area analysis provided a clear direction for future work?
- Has anything come up in the internal review or consultation that is at odds with area analysis?
- What new issues need to be taken into account?
- Do objectives proposed reflect the aims of the programme?
- Do objectives proposed reflect the principles of the programme?
- Are local priorities able to be linked to National goal objectives?

It is important that objectives SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed. For further information and examples see programme guidelines). The balance of the four goals within the Programme needs to be reflected at a local level in the development of objectives and outcomes. This means that the 10/40/40/10 allocation of funding must be translated into a similar split in terms of resources expended under each of the four goals.

In addition to the funding allocation, a prioritisation system for the outcomes and indicators of the Programme has been established. Some outcomes within the Programme have been identified as higher priority than others. This is reflected within the Programme framework with *** meaning higher priority and * meaning of lesser priority. Goal 4 outcomes and indicators have not been given priority ranking. This is because they do not lend themselves to it as many outcomes are interrelated. LDCs should demonstrate that resources will be allocated and targeted at the local objective statements which meet higher priority outcomes and indicators.

At this stage it is normal that disagreements on priorities come to the surface. Different partners may differ on the best approach. Sometimes it is useful to use an independent facilitator to tease out the consequences of adopting different objectives. Common dilemmas can include:

- Does the organisation provide limited support for many or a great deal of support for a few?
- How will progress be measured if this objective is set?
- Will partners be able to deliver on agreed strategies in order to meet the overall objective?
- Does the organisation focus on the symptoms or the cause of issues arising?
- Does the organisation provide the service or campaign for change in others?

Requirements for translating the National Framework into local objectives (for more information refer to Strategic Planning Format)

1. Each local objective statement will be linked to a Programme goal. LDCs are required to limit the number of local objective statements developed to a maximum of 10.
2. Each local objective statement will meet at least one of its assigned goal outcomes. A local objective statement may meet more than one Programme outcome under an assigned goal. It may also meet outcomes from Goals that it has not been assigned to. It may be helpful to develop separate objective statements within goals for outcomes that have different priorities.
3. The need for balance will mean that local objective statements set are developed to ensure that a significant number of national objectives and outcomes are met from across the four goals. At least one local objective statement should be identified for each goal.
4. Select the Programme outcome(s) that each local objective statement has been developed to address.
5. Select from the menu of Programme indicators, the most appropriate indicators to measure the local objective statement set and the activities proposed.
6. Identify a target for each indicator. This will be quantitative where possible and appropriate. It is likely to be established from work undertaken to baseline or identify what the current position with regard the named indicator (see below).
7. A baseline from which to measure progress will be included in the objectives section of the strategic plan. This could be based on numbers of people engaging in a service/ level of education in a particular area/ employability of individuals/ infrastructure project completed etc.
8. The local objective statements proposed will contribute to meeting the participation rates for the programme as per the programme guidelines.

Please see example below:

Goal 2 Excerpt from National Framework

Goal 2	Objectives	Outcomes
1. Increase access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural activities and resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with providers to improve access to a wide range of opportunities 2. Increase awareness and support access to opportunities for educational, recreational and cultural development 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased opportunity of access to recreational and cultural activities* 2. Increased awareness and uptake of <u>formal</u> (to include pre-school compulsory and post compulsory accredited education and training) and <u>informal</u> (to include youth work and non-accredited post compulsory education or training) educational opportunities for children, young people and adults***

Goal Two Local Objective Statement

'To increase awareness and uptake of post compulsory accredited education for lone parents (18-28) from areas X,Y,Z by 2014'

Depending on the strategies and actions that LDCs are planning to deliver, the appropriate indicators for the work will be selected. In the above example the following Programme indicators may be appropriate

Number and % of people participating in LDC supported educational activities over a 12 month period***

Number and % of people supported by LDCs who enroll in accredited post compulsory education or training***

Number and % of people supported by LDCs who enroll in non-accredited post compulsory education or training
**

Developing Actions to deliver Programme Outcomes

The actions section of the strategic planning format will identify how the local objective will be met. This section should identify activities and key planning and policy structure that will be developed or supported to meet local objective statements. This will be further elaborated in annual plans for each year of the programme.

Measuring Achievements towards Outcomes

When setting local objective statements, it is important for LDCs to identify how they can measure progress towards outcomes identified. The onus is on LDCs to:

- 1) Identify realistic baselines or the starting point for work;
- 2) Identify what progress against the targets set they would like to see at the end of each year of Programme implementation
- 3) To set realistic and achievable targets for each indicator selected over the lifetime of the programme.

The Programme evaluation will examine whether targets set are reasonable and given resources allocated are ambitious enough to deliver outcomes for beneficiary groups. It is therefore important to use the strategic planning process to gain the commitment of other partners who will also be delivering actions that contribute to outcomes being met.

For further guidance in relation to this please see Programme Planning and Assessment Guidelines document.

Step 7 - Agree procedures, structures and policies that will facilitate the achievement of objectives



Procedures, structures and policies will dictate how work is to be undertaken to achieve objectives. It would be useful at this stage to reflect on existing procedures, structures and policies, and skills sets that are currently in place or available. How these have worked in the past and whether new structures/ skills sets are now needed. The types of procedures, structures and policies to be reviewed/ revised may be:

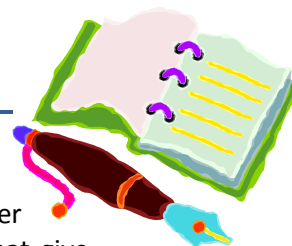
- Terms of reference or statement on how work will be managed in sub-groups
- Equality statements
- Proofing guidelines
- Monitoring structures
- Financial guidelines and procedures

- Reporting procedures
- Board and staff training

Questions that may be useful in undertaking a review of existing structures and deciding upon new ways of working may be:

- What works well and why?
- What doesn't work so well and why?
- How can things be improved?
- Do organisational policies reflect the principles of the programme?
- How are these policies implemented - is this sufficient and could it be improved?
- How are decisions made, and to what extent does decision making reflect the principles of the programme?
- How can decision making be more effective, efficient and inclusive?
- Do existing sub-structures meet the requirements of the new LCDP?
- Are sub-groups and committees operating under clear terms of reference that sets out their roles and responsibilities and how they carry them out?
- Are sub-groups and committees effective, efficient and inclusive of beneficiary groups? How can this be improved? What supports are needed?
- How do companies communicate internally and to the outside world? Could this be improved and how?
- What training needs to be put in place for board, management and staff?

Step 8 - Bringing all elements together and structure into a plan



Planning can be challenging and time consuming. At this stage a significant amount of work will have been undertaken. It is important that all the work is now brought together in the shape of a strategic plan. The headings provided in the strategic planning format give guidance on how plans are to be structured. All stakeholders who have been involved should be informed of the outcomes of the process and a copy of the final plan circulated to them.

Step 9 - Review the Process of Planning

Once the plan is written, in order to learn from the process, it is important to review how planning exercises have gone. A strategic planning process is a long and sometimes difficult process for a group and it is important that LDCs learn what suits their organisation and circumstances and what is the best way of working effectively. It is important that LDCs look back on a review process sooner rather than later when it is fresh in the mind. If there have been difficulties, feelings may be running high and these will need to be addressed. The process should not take too long and can be undertaken by the board or specified committee. It should focus on how the planning was undertaken not the results or feedback. Questions to focus on will be:



- What worked well?
- What would have been done differently the next time?
- How can participation of stakeholders be improved?
- What lessons have been learned?
- How can these lessons be built on in the future?

Responses should be recorded in summary format, circulated and kept on file for the next planning process.

Step 10 - Acknowledging the process and its achievements

Any planning process can be time consuming and can raise many issues for organisations. It can throw up differences of opinion and at the same time encourage and motivate people. It can be challenging yet rewarding and will result in a clearer strategic focus on work to be undertaken on the ground. It is important that the work of preparing and enacting the strategic planning process is recognised. There are many ways to thank people for their involvement. Ensure that everyone who has been involved is thanked and kept up to date with progress as a result of the planning exercise.

