

WORKING NOTES

NUMBER 19
OCTOBER 1993



FACTS AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING: DOES THE GOVERNMENT NEED AN OUTREACH FACILITY?

A few months ago applications for support from the Global Grant for Local Development, were invited through the national Press. The advertisements were intended for local community bodies.

In at least one local community we know of, it was by mere chance that somebody associated with the area saw one of the advertisements and alerted community activists in time to make an application. In another area the advertisement was not seen at all and no application was made.

While on the face of it it seems fair to solicit applications for this kind of funding through public advertisement, does this procedure actually succeed in informing the people who need to be informed? Many people in poorer areas do not read Irish newspapers. Many people do not scan newspapers for advertisements of this type. Many community activists would not understand that this advertisement might be relevant to them, or what the reference in the advertisement to 'capacity-building' might mean. In the community mentioned above, when a meeting of the local residents' association was told about the advertisement by the person who had seen it, nobody else in the hall knew anything about it. Is it possible that knowledge of schemes of this kind gets distributed through the population in inverse proportion to the need for it?

In its most recent bulletin the European Anti-Poverty Network has highlighted the problems of marginalised groups in accessing funding. It makes the point that marginalised groups often lack the skills and resources needed to prepare applications and that there should be some assistance available to them for this. It notes that inevitably large amounts of funding are 'commandeered' by large well-supported voluntary and semi-state organisations.

The government is clearly out of touch with the realities on the ground. The EAPN bulletin quotes a civil servant as saying that while one application form was pretty daunting, "it served the function of enabling the Department to ... eliminate those who did not really know what they wanted from the programme". In the most marginalised areas the problem is precisely that the local people are not in any position to know what they want from these programmes or what they are about. We are talking here of ghettoised communities of up to 5,000 people with 70% unemployment, with 53% of the population out of school by fifteen, with nobody in the community with third level education. These people can be easily "eliminated".

Would it not be possible to put in place some system of outreach whereby the most disadvantaged communities could be identified, communicated with and offered advice on the application process? EAPN suggests an independent non-governmental organisation to circulate information and provide help. The present procedures leave too much to chance and risk leaving the poorest even further behind.