

Towards a progressive model of collaborative governance

A Community Platform Discussion Paper June 2022

01. Introduction

The Programme for Government (PFG) 2020-2025, sets out the Government's commitments to social dialogue recognising "the importance of regular and open engagement with all sectors of society". It commits to the establishment of a Social Dialogue Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach and to "create new models of sectoral engagement". The Community Platform¹ welcomes the emphasis on new 'models' as opposed to a single approach to sectoral engagement between the state and civil society. This approach is particularly important as we steer our way out of the pandemic, rebuild our economy and support communities that have been severely impacted by Covid-19. We do this while also facing the challenge of climate change in a serious way. New effective models will support the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including through the building of more effective, accountable and inclusive institutions as committed to under Goal 16.

Complex Social Problems

Many of the issues that public policy is struggling to deal with involve the need for cooperation between multiple government departments and/or public agencies. They often involve trying to influence people's attitudes and behaviour, rather than simply delivering a service. Complex social problems include issues such as climate change, housing and accommodation, childcare, poverty and inequality, global migration, the drugs crisis, and the threats posed by global and domestic far right movements.

To move forward, it is necessary to address the challenges with current models of engagement between the state and civil society. Community Platform members have identified a number of core concerns including; a lack of joined up, multidimensional and complementary approaches to solving issues; limited collaborative leadership capacity; the engagement of civil society in mechanisms that demand time and energy, but which struggle to generate effective outcomes; and a need and willingness from all participants in collaborative processes to learn from each other.

In addition, we are concerned at the lack of clarity about accountability and implementation, and processes to support the participation of affected communities in public policy development. Many structures and models of engagement are outdated and we need new ways of thinking and critical reflection.

New Approaches

The purpose of this document is to propose a new approach to solving complex problems based on effective engagement between the state and civil society. This builds on the Platform's 'Valuing Social Dialogue' paper³ and sets out how new, innovative and more collaborative approaches to engagement can be created. We need approaches that are dynamic and fit for purpose, and that maximise involvement and harness the expertise of organisations and communities.

1 The Community Platform, is an alliance of 30 national networks and organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality

2 In practice, in Ireland civil society organisations are generally understood as trade unions, employer organisations, farming organisations, environmental organisations and the broadly based community and voluntary sector

3 Community Platform 2020, Valuing Social Dialogue. <https://communityplatform.ie/publication/valuing-social-dialogue/>

02. Collaborative Governance

There is extensive international research on the effectiveness of collaborative governance as an approach to addressing complex problems and issues that cannot be solved unilaterally⁴, see more in Appendix 1. This approach has the potential to mobilise ideas, resources and support for jointly created solutions, in a way that does not marginalise issues within more traditional social dialogue processes favouring economically powerful actors⁵. As such, its relevance as a vehicle to address issues such as poverty, inequality, homelessness, climate change, and social exclusion is clear. The Community Platform is proposing mainstreaming collaborative governance as an approach to public policy with processes that are flexible, diverse and responsive. This recognises that different approaches, processes and mechanisms will be effective and appropriate for different contexts. The Platform has drawn from some processes in Ireland that demonstrate some elements of promising practice which is presented in Appendix 2 and dispersed in text boxes throughout the document.

Example of Leadership and Willingness to Engage

In developing the government strategy 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland (SIEC)', Community Platform members identified leadership and a real willingness to engage, as well as a willingness to consider and, with limitations, accept the contribution from the range of stakeholders. In the SIEC process the Department of Rural and Community Development realised that it could not develop an effective strategy without the participation of other stakeholders.

Example of Valuing Expertise and Practice

The approach to developing the 3rd National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence values the expertise of front-line service providers and seeks to harness their practice and wisdom as a key component in developing effective policy and implementation.

Principles for Collaborative Governance

Learning from collaboration in Ireland and effective collaborative governance elsewhere⁶ suggest that collaborative processes and structures must be underpinned by a set of core principles. These principles are based on recognition of mutual interdependence between the state and civil society to tackle and resolve deep rooted and persistent problems.

The principles are:

Leadership, with a real willingness to engage and a belief that the process will lead to better outcomes.

Early trust building and processes to support **dialogue and deliberation**.

Identifying power differentials and transparent motivation for engagement from all participants.

Collaboration with relevant stakeholders, and innovation in supporting **different forms of participation**.

Co-design and shared decision-making.

Informed and deliberative approaches and processes valuing relevant expertise and lived experience.

Flexibility and innovation and linking mechanisms to the issue specific purpose they are required to serve.

Willingness to adequately resource collaborative processes.

Commitment to early planning, creating transparent and accountable **implementation and monitoring** mechanisms.

Example of Early Trust Building

In developing the 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities' strategy, the Cross Sectoral Group overseeing the development of the strategy, spent considerable time in initial deliberations and on mutually identifying ways to proceed. They also spent time exploring, discussing, debating and agreeing the values that should inform both the strategy itself and the ways in which the cross sectoral group would work together.

4 Emerson, Kirk, Nabatchi, Balogh, Stephen (2011) An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance. Oxford University Press

5 Cristofolia et al Public Management Review 2021

6 At Utrecht University in the Netherlands, a collaborative governance database has been created to capture the learning from collaborative governance processes, highlighting the multiple forms of collaboration that can exist and the purposes they can serve. <https://collaborativegovernancedatabase.sites.uu.nl/contributors/>

Example of Valuing Lived Experience

The Department of Health in developing The Women's Health Taskforce established an in-depth consultation process with health services users using a 'Radical Listening exercise'. They prioritised focus groups with marginalised women to ascertain their experiences and views on their interactions with the health service.

Example of Flexibility and Innovation

The work of the Women's Health Task Force and its partnership with the National Women's Council shows the potential of a new collaborative approach with civil society. It is clearly a dynamic process that is not linear in its progress and involves two-way learning and understanding. It also shows a willingness on the part of the part of the Department of Health to take risks to develop a stronger collaborative and co-design approach to policy and shaping policy outcomes.

Structures

The Community Platform proposes a number of key structures and monitoring arrangements for effective collaboration.

Collaborative Governance Advisory Body

In order to ensure consistency, coherence and clarity to the proposed approach, the Community Platform recommends the establishment of an overarching high level Collaborative Governance Advisory Body, led by the Department of the Taoiseach.

Membership of the Advisory Body should comprise representation from:

- Senior officials from government departments
- Community and voluntary sector organisations including the Community Platform's diverse membership
- Trade Unions
- Business and employer organisations
- Farming and fishing organisations
- Environmental sector

The role of the Advisory Body should be to:

- Identify issues or themes of societal importance to be addressed through a collaborative process.
- Liaise with the relevant government department(s) which will take the lead on particular collaborative processes to agree appropriate mechanisms and structures and set up issue specific working groups.
- Make recommendations to address capacity gaps.
- Be responsible for oversight and maintaining the standards of collaborative governance practices to ensure effective outcomes.
- Monitoring and review of agreed processes.

In proposing this role for an overarching structure, the potential for individual departments to take their own additional collaborative initiatives is not precluded.

Issue Specific Working Groups

Collaborative governance processes should be undertaken by issue specific groups working on agreed themes of high-level societal importance, for example, housing, childcare and climate change. These groups should be led by the relevant Government Department and have a direct relationship with the Collaborative Governance Advisory Body in fulfilling its oversight role.

Relationships with Oireachtas Committees

The Community Platform believes that there should be a direct link between the collaborative governance processes and relevant Oireachtas committees. The Collaborative Governance Advisory Body could also invite Oireachtas committees to recommend themes for consideration.

Processes

In order for the collaborative governance process to function effectively, there must be a shift from power-based bargaining to the creation of enabling processes underpinned by a core set of values. These values, already adopted by government⁷, include social justice, sustainable development, social inclusion, human rights, equality, anti-discrimination, empowerment, active participation and collectivity.

The following processes are required to ensure effective outcomes and are illustrated with examples from existing collaborative processes in Ireland.

1. Skilled engaged, facilitative and collaborative oriented leadership

Leadership is the 'first essential driver' of collaboration⁸. For the public sector in particular, administrators operate in an increasingly networked and collaborative space that require a different type of leadership capacity. A key attribute to enabling collaborative working, is that of a 'collaborative mindset', which sees the potential for connecting, co-operating, and fostering mutual trust⁹. If collaborative processes are to be enabled by public sector leaders, it requires a combination of values and skills and must be consciously cultivated. In this context, the Community Platform believes there is a need to provide specific collaborative leadership training for senior officials across all government departments to embed and enable the necessary mindset and skills.

2. Selecting structure and participants

Establishing the appropriate structure and getting the most appropriate, diverse and directly knowledgeable people around the table on specific issues has the potential to greatly benefit policy. Appropriateness applies to the means or forms of engagement; the term and intensity of the process; the stakeholders that need to be involved, taking account of those who are impacted and who has responsibility for implementation; and the nature and type of support required. Appropriateness also applies to ensuring inclusion and diversity that will 'give voice to multiple perspectives and different interests, allowing the development of more thoughtful decisions that take a broader view of who will benefit or be harmed by an action'¹⁰. The more heterogeneous the actors that participate, the more widespread the support from relevant and affected constituents¹¹. Involved stakeholders

need to be collectively representative of or directly engaged with the communities affected by the issue under consideration, have a track record in working on the issue or theme under discussion and have the capacity and commitment to be accountable.

3. Early trust building

This includes investment of time in building confidence and sharing expectations, and in exploring the historical context and obstacles that might stop collaboration and deliberation. This process could start off with an exercise to identify shared ambitions and motivations for engagement, and could be used to develop co-created visioning, as well as helping to understand bottom lines about the policy issue in question. This pre-collaboration phase would also allow an opportunity for participants to acknowledge underlying ideologies and perspectives. Finally, it could help provide clarity about the boundaries of the collaborative process and recognise that consensus is not always an obligatory end product.

4. Statement of commitment to collaborative governance

Participants develop an agreement and establish a clear statement of commitment to collaborative governance including shared decision-making and deliberative approaches¹².

Deliberative approaches emphasise:

- Reasonableness, requiring a willingness not only to have opinions but to listen to the opinions of others.
- Openness and transparency in deliberations.
- More widespread participation within deliberative processes.
- The need for skilled and equitable facilitation of deliberations, especially where facilitation is carried out by public officials.
- Norms of equality, where all participants have a right to initiate discussion, to question and to debate.
- That topics for deliberation must also be open to question by all participants.
- That the rules and procedures of the deliberative process should be open to debate as should the agenda for discussion.
- Reciprocity, referring to the requirement for mutual respect and being willing to treat others as one might like to be treated.
- The inclusion of those affected by the issue under discussion on an equal basis, without fear of domination.

⁷ Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, 2019. <https://assets.gov.ie/26890/ff380490589a4f9ab9cd9bb3f53b5493.pdf>

⁸ Emerson, Nabatchi et al. 2011:9

⁹ Morse 2010:233

¹⁰ Emerson, Kirk, Nabatchi, Balogh, Stephen (2011) An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance. Oxford University Press.

¹¹ Cristofoli et al (2021) p. 3

¹² According to Cohen and Fung (2004:24), deliberative democracy aims to: "shift from bargaining, interest aggregation and power to the common reason of equal citizens as a dominant force in democratic life".

- A statement of clearly intended outcomes, try to meet the aspirations of all participants and deliver co-designed responses.

Example of Problem-solving and Joint Decision-making

In the development of the 3rd Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence the methods of working moved beyond traditional consultation, and exemplified a genuine process of joint discussion, problem-solving and decision-making, while recognising the Department and Government would make final decisions on the content of the Strategy.

Example of Collaborative Working

The processes employed by the Women's Health Task Force, includes collaborative working, problem solving, strategic planning and prioritising of actions. A space is provided for real reflection on the work and robust discussion on the progress and plans ahead.

5. Resourcing

Good quality collaborative processes cannot hope to be successful without adequate resourcing, including secretariat support from the lead department. The Community Platform proposes to create four resource streams to enable effective collaborative governance. These include:

Resource stream A: Supporting participation

There needs to be a recognition that participation in the co-creation of policy is both resource and time intensive. Community sector organisations in particular, operate with very finite resources and community representatives at times can be unpaid volunteers. Specific responses need to be put in place to enable the participation of such community representatives, for example childcare, travel costs, personal assistance, and the additional resourcing of community sector organisations to provide necessary support. Resources will also be needed to allow for the organisation of stakeholder forums as a means of broadening participation.

Resource stream B: Supporting facilitation

In some cases, the operation of the different collaborative governance processes can be facilitated not only by senior staff in the responsible government department, but also by skilled civil society participants. However, in other

circumstances, it may be necessary to use the services of independent facilitators, thereby freeing up all participants to contribute their thinking and creativity. Resources to fund independent facilitation where relevant and necessary should be provided.

Resource stream C: Deepening accountability

Accountability is a resource and time intensive exercise. The Community Platform is proposing that a specific accountability budget line be provided to resource accountability procedures and practices, including funding stakeholder forums or events as mentioned above. Transparent reports and feedback on progress is a core part of the implementation process and must also be a key feature of stakeholder events.

Resource stream D: Independent research

The Community Platform suggests that there may be a need to create a specific funding mechanism to enable independent research to be carried out to enable and evaluate the process.

6. Implementation and monitoring

The collaborative governance process requires monitoring structures that have a strong focus on implementation and review, so that the outcomes of the deliberative process are delivered as was intended. This will also capture if sustained implementation has been achieved over an extended period. In order to ensure impact, the collaborative governance process needs to have a strong results focus accompanied by associated indicators and timelines and a clearly articulated process of monitoring and evaluation. This implementation process must be co-designed with participants.

03. The Benefits of Collaborative Governance

A results-oriented approach and collaborative governance helps to guard against the danger of setting up engagement mechanisms that are insufficiently focused, replicate the mistakes of the past, and are likely to only serve the interest of a small number of participants.

Addressing key societal challenges

There are many serious challenges facing our society, at both a domestic and a global level, including the Covid crisis, the climate emergency, rising levels of poverty, inequality and homelessness, the provision of affordable and accessible public services, the quality of jobs, global migration, the drugs crisis, and the threats posed by global and domestic far right movements. These all require new, flexible, adaptable and responsive ways of engaging and co-designing effective responses. As acknowledged by the Government: 'Complex policy issues cannot be solved by the Government alone. When citizens are engaged in public policy making it leads to more informed decisions'¹³. This requires the state to meaningfully recognise communities and representative organisations directly as key stakeholders with a significant contribution to make as these and future challenges are addressed.

Delivering transformative solutions

While it is important to be able to understand and respond to societal challenges, it is even more important that responses are genuinely transformative in nature and longer term in orientation. At this point, deferring responsibility and producing short-term solutions, based on an insufficient understanding of the issues, is of no value. Transformative solutions are those that go beyond narrow, self-serving, motivated reasoning. They go beyond the psychological or intellectual frame(s) of reference of one or of a small group of already dependent elites, be it political, administrative or economic. A key purpose of engagement between the state and civil society must be the production and nurturing of such transformative capacity, something that requires the balanced and equal engagement of a range of different voices, perspectives and ambitions.

Enabling flexibility and responsiveness

Our society, domestically and internationally, is evolving rapidly, subject to a range of ever changing economic, technological, environmental and political pressures. The pace of change dictates that the processes of state-civil society engagement have the ability to be flexible and to recognise and respond to emerging threats, challenges, and opportunities. Reliance on historical forms and mechanisms of state-civil society engagement, while satisfying short sighted notions of procedural simplicity, do not have the capacity for such flexibility and responsiveness. In their place, we require more focused, nimble and nuanced collaborative governance processes.

Deepening democracy

Creating genuine, problem-oriented collaborative governance processes has the potential to broaden and deepen democratic experiences and, in the process, protect and enrich our democracy, something that is too often taken for granted. The United Nations recognises that political and public participation plays a crucial role in promoting democratic governance, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development, as well as in advancing all human rights. The right to directly and indirectly participate in political and public life is important in empowering individuals and groups, and is one of the core elements of human rights-based approaches aimed at eliminating marginalisation and discrimination. Participation rights are inextricably linked to other human rights such as the rights to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of expression and opinion and the rights to education and to information¹⁴.

Increasing public accountability

As well as being problem and solution-oriented, collaboration-oriented state-civil society relationships have the potential to improve public accountability. Accountability includes the range of rules, regulations and mechanisms that call upon government actors to justify their actions, act upon criticisms or requirements made of them, and accept responsibility for failure to perform with respect to laws or commitments. However, a public facing element of accountability is required. More balanced, collaboration oriented, and transparent engagement processes between the state and civil society organisations can contribute substantially to strengthening public facing accountability. However, state-civil society engagement mechanisms can only do this if such mechanisms are accountable and democratically legitimate.

¹³ Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, December 2016, Ireland's Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016-2018.

¹⁴ United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/EqualParticipation.aspx>

Building capacity in our public services

Finally, one of the potential outcomes served by effective state-civil society engagement is contributing to the capacity of the public sector to design and deliver policy. The types of capacity required of a modern public sector are many and diverse and are not only to be found within state institutions. Effective and broadly based engagement with a range of civil society organisations has the potential to contribute to building public sector capacity, not least in responding to the types of capacity requirements identified in the OECD Assessment of Ireland's second Public Service Reform Plan 2014-16.

04. Conclusion

In this paper, the Community Platform has outlined an approach to engaging civil society and communities in public policy making. This involves a significant shift from a narrow approach of informing, consulting and engaging with civil society to one of co-design and co-creation as partners and collaborators. It has highlighted the need for new processes, while recognising that different approaches, processes and mechanisms will be effective and appropriate for different contexts. It outlines the potential of collaborative governance as an approach to address problems that could not otherwise be accomplished. It proposes a commitment to ongoing dialogue, discussion and debate, and to the participation of all sectors of society and diverse actors including marginalised and excluded communities, in a genuine process to co-create and co-monitor policy and practice. We believe that collaborative governance processes will lead to better outcomes for people, it will deliver collective and shared agreements on big societal issues, while deepening democracy, accountability and transparency.

Next Steps

The Community Platform believes that widening participation will increase accountability and democratic legitimacy and highlights the need for collaborative oriented leadership and a cultural shift within public bodies to deliver on this type of approach. But it also requires political commitment and a vision that goes far beyond current structures and processes of social dialogue and consultation.

We propose that:

- The Social Dialogue unit in the Department of An Taoiseach establish a working group on collaborative governance
- A Rapid Evidence Assessment is carried out of existing national and international promising practices, including the involvement of elected representatives
- A Collaborative Governance Advisory Body is set up and resourced to set in motion the building blocks necessary to deliver this new approach
- Two complex social problems are identified to collaboratively test, design and evaluate appropriate collaborative governance mechanisms.

Appendix I

International learning on collaborative governance

There is extensive international research on the theme of collaborative governance from which the Community Platform draws our analysis and proposals. This appendix further elaborates on this research. International experience shows that engagement between the state and civil society organisations need not just be limited to 'social dialogue' processes and the assumptions that frequently accompany them, such as that they are mechanisms to enable engagement between the state, employers and trade unions leaving out other key stakeholders.

Collaborative governance is described as 'the process and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished'¹⁵.

The impacts resulting from collaborative action are likely to be closer to the targeted outcomes with fewer unintended negative consequences when they are specified and come from a shared theory of action during collaborative dynamics¹⁶.

Literature highlights some of the central points for collaborative governance.

Addressing Complex Problems

Collaborative governance is often used to address complex problems. As such, its relevance as a vehicle to address issues such as poverty, inequality, homelessness, social exclusion, climate change and others in Ireland is clear.

'Collaborative governance is welcomed by public and private actors who realize that a group of actors collaborating constructively with one another can often solve problems and tasks that none of them could solve alone'¹⁷.

'Collaboration across boundaries—whether among public agencies, across governmental levels, or with the private and civic sectors or

the general public—is increasingly called on to handle the complex, multijurisdictional challenges we face in the twenty-first century'¹⁸.

Deciding who should be at the table

A key question in the design of successful collaborative governance processes is that of who should be involved. Approaches to involvement need to be inclusive, pragmatic and time sensitive:

'If the purpose of a collaboration is to find innovative solutions to wicked problems, network conveners need to develop a pragmatic understanding of which government and nongovernment actors should be a part of the collaborative endeavour and when'¹⁹.

Flexibility and appropriate to the task

This idea of pragmatism and of developing thematically based or issue specific collaborations is common in the international literature, and suggests that the utility of fixed, rigid and institutionalised social dialogue processes are less capable of solving complex problems and may just lead to continued 'elite capture' of participatory processes i.e. participation processes serve to amplify the voices of already powerful actors, while continuing to marginalise the voices of those concerned with equality, social justice and inclusion.

Facilitative leadership

International experience highlights the centrality of leadership in facilitating and enabling collaborative governance processes. It is worth noting the conclusions of one of the leading researchers on collaborative governance on this issue of leadership, emphasising in particular, the role of facilitative leadership.

'Facilitative leaders attract and retain collaborative commitment among stakeholders by working towards smartly composed networks, fostering shared motivation among participants, ensuring that authentic and constructive dialogue takes place, and building a capacity for joint action Such leadership includes maintaining the integrity of the collaborative process by ensuring that stakeholders abide by the rules of the game and ensuring the ability of 'weaker stakeholders' to participate more fully, difficult as that may be to accomplish'²⁰.

15 Emerson, Kirk, Nabatchi, Balogh, Stephen (2011) *An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance*. Oxford University Press

16 *ibid*

17 Cristofolia et al *Public Management Review* 2021

18 Emerson and Nabatchi 2015 p 718

19 Ansel 2020 p 573

20 Ansel 2020 p 574

Legitimacy and accountability

The literature also addressed the twin issues of legitimacy and accountability and recognises that they too can be a problem in collaborative governance processes. However, these two crucial issues could be addressed by:

'Firstly, allowing for a large group of actors to be involved ensures that it is not only a few privileged actors who are involved in decision-making. Secondly, ensuring a high degree of diversity among these actors ensures that more interests are represented and that a broad range of ideas and resources are mobilised in formulating a joint solution. The more actors that participate and the more heterogeneous they are, the more widespread is the support from relevant and affected constituents²¹.

This suggests that processes that maximise the number and diversity of actors involved in dialogue and deliberation increase the legitimacy of the processes and the potential for accountability.

As the national examples in Appendix 2 shows, it is possible to achieve this without losing focus within theme specific, decentred collaboration processes that benefit from committed and shared leadership from within Government departments and civil society organisations.

Deepening participation

For collaborative governance to be effective, participation must be meaningful. Smith notes that different innovations to deepen participation will work in different environments. However, whilst recognising that no innovation is 'perfect' he offers the following general recommendations for consideration towards increasing and deepening participation.

- Rhetoric is not enough and public authorities must have the will, resources and freedom to embrace democratic innovations to back up any political priority to enhance participation.
- Cultural change is needed within political authorities if systematic participation is to be embedded in our political system. Citizens and residents must believe that participation will make a difference. Effective internal systems need to be developed within public bodies so that the results of participation exercises are able to influence decision-makers. Authorities must provide feedback to citizens and residents to show how participation has affected policy and services.
- Using independent bodies to facilitate participation should be considered, where necessary and appropriate e.g. to overcome suspicions of the motives of public authorities.
- Effective participation does not come cheap and dedicated resources (for staff, training, capacity building and so on) are needed.
- People must be respected and given incentives (or a reason) to participate. This can be as simple as directly inviting people to be involved.
- Creativity and imagination are required in designing effective approaches to building effective and engaging collaborative governance structures and processes.

Appendix 2

Promising Practices that can positively impact on collaborative potential

Various Community Platform members have been engaging in a range of collaborative processes. The following are a number of examples of where some of the principles of collaborative governance are visible to varying degrees of effectiveness.

I. Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities - A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland (SIEC)

The development of the Department of Rural and Community Development's strategy in 2019 was overseen by a cross-sectoral group made up of representatives from Government departments and the community, voluntary, local development, academic and local government sectors.

Recognition of mutual interdependence

In the development of the strategy, Community Platform members identified leadership and a real willingness to engage. There was also a willingness to consider and, with limitations, accept the contribution from the range of stakeholders. In the SIEC process also, there was a realisation on the part of the Department of Rural and Community Development that it could not develop an effective strategy without the participation of other stakeholders.

Investing in early dialogue and trust building

Considerable time was spent in initial deliberations and on mutually identifying ways to proceed as well as exploring, discussing, debating and agreeing the values that should inform both the strategy itself and the ways in which the cross sectoral group would work together. A subgroup of the Cross Sectoral Group worked intensively on various drafts. Communication with members was also undertaken by the Department in the final stages of writing the document, which explained why certain issues/suggestions could not be included.

Identifying where power lies

Perhaps inevitably, ultimate power remained with the Department and there were a few issues that emerged in the final document that had not been discussed or agreed.

Planning for results

There was an identifiable outcome that did not give every stakeholder all they wanted but was acceptable to all stakeholders, and the influence of the process was clear in the ultimate strategy. Feedback from Cross-sectoral group members on the process and the final document suggests overall satisfaction and a sense of inclusion and being listened to.

2. The Women's Health Taskforce

This was established in 2019 by the Department of Health to improve women's health outcomes and experiences of healthcare, partnered with a range of statutory health providers, government departments, the European Institute for Women's Health and the National Women's Council (NWC).

The partnership with NWC, includes collaborative working, problem solving, strategic planning and prioritising of actions. This provides a space for real reflection on the work and robust discussion on the progress and plans ahead. The Taskforce meets regularly to review the work and NWC meets regularly with Departmental officials responsible for the Taskforce. This partnership additionally provides for a direct connection to the network of women and women's organisations represented by the NWC for their input into health issues at critical points in the decision-making process. A significant outcome in 2021 was a dedicated Women's Health budget announced in Budget 2022.

Flexibility and risk taking

The methods used and approach to working in the process of the Taskforce show the potential of a new collaborative approach with civil society. It is clearly a dynamic process and it is not linear in its progress and involves two-way learning and understanding. It also shows a willingness on the part of the Department to take risks to develop a stronger collaborative and co-design approach to policy and shaping policy outcomes.

Valuing lived experience

The Department established an in-depth consultation process with health services users using a 'Radical Listening exercise'. They prioritised focus groups with marginalised women to get their experiences and views on their interactions with the health service. A commitment to continue to 'listen' to women and their experiences is a key part of the implementation of the new Women's Health Action plan.

3. Third Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence

The Department of Justice established a partnership with National Women's Council (NWC) and Safe Ireland to develop the Third Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence. The partnership was formed from a request by the Department to civil society organisations participating on the National Monitoring Committee on DSGBV for expressions of interest to work in partnership with the Department on the Strategy. The partnership is officially recognised through a contract with the Department, memo of understanding and funding to carry out the work. Through the partnership NWC and Safe Ireland worked with the Department to engage consultants to develop the new strategy and to agree terms of reference for their work.

Shared decision-making

The approach to the development of the partnership was open and transparent. The methods of working moved beyond traditional consultation, and exemplified a genuine process of joint discussion, problem-solving and decision-making, while recognising the Department and Government will make final decisions on the content of the Strategy. The partnership model developed is especially appropriate in this instance as it reflects a new approach to the coordination and delivery of these important public services to address gender-based violence and incorporating the delivery of services through state funding.

Valuing expertise

Equally, the approach values the expertise of front-line service providers and seeks to harness their practice wisdom as a key component in developing effective policy and implementation. It is noteworthy that this approach was developed to design and agree a new Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (DSGBV) as it has built an important foundation for how the Strategy will be implemented across Government. The inclusion of a co-design and collaborative approach in the delivery of services, training, development of policy and legislative change represents a new way forward. The recognition that a new relationship with civil society is required to address DSGBV will be critical to the success of the Strategy and to achieve the outcomes that are needed.

We would like to thank Dr Chris McInerney,
University of Limerick for providing advice and
support in the development of this document.



COMMUNITY PLATFORM
CHALLENGING POVERTY & INEQUALITY

The Community Platform

c/o EAPN Ireland,
Carmichael House,
4 Brunswick Street North
Dublin, D07 RHA8

Phone: +353 (0)1 874 5737

Email: communityplatform@eapn.ie

Website: www.communityplatform.ie

The Community Platform is an alliance of 32 national networks and organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

- Age Action Ireland
 - All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland
 - Community Action Network
 - Community Work Ireland
 - Cairde
 - Debt and Development Coalition
 - European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland
 - Family Resource Centre National Forum
 - Focus Ireland
 - Immigrant Council of Ireland
 - Independent Living Movement Ireland
 - Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
 - Irish Penal Reform Trust
 - Irish Refugee Council
 - Irish Rural Link
 - Irish Traveller Movement
 - Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
 - National Adult Literacy Agency
 - National Traveller Women's Forum
 - National Women's Council
 - One Family
 - Pavee Point
 - Rape Crisis Network Ireland
 - Safe Ireland
 - Sign Language Interpreting Service
 - Simon Communities of Ireland
 - TASC
 - Threshold
 - Treoir
 - Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice
 - Women's Aid
 - Women's Collective Ireland
-