



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN ESF – BACKGROUND PAPER

Background

ESF is a national Programme but with Regional management. The high level Objectives of the Programme are set in a National Operation Programme, which has been set to give “flexibility” in delivery. Each Region has a Regional Monitoring Committee (RMC) which agrees a high level strategic document to shape the Programme within its region. The RMC is a cross-sectoral Partnership, (where full Third Sector participation is – uniquely – guaranteed by EU Regulations). In the last, 2000-07, Programme the governing plan was called a Regional Development Plan (RDP), in the current, 2008-13, programme it is called a **Framework**.

The funds are dispersed by Co-Financing Organisations (CFOs - principally The LSC and JCP) who write plans that conform to the governing strategic document and then put activity in their plans out to tender using their usual procurement methods.

In the last (2000-7) Programme 25% of all ESF was ring-fenced in a *Priority* for “Inclusion” work, addressing the needs of those furthest from the labour market, with barriers to gaining access to any labour market orientated provision.

In 2000-08, The East Midlands region decided, with substantial input from the Third sector, to adopt a **Community Empowerment Strategy** to govern use of all these funds – some £50m.

The Community Empowerment Strategy is a text over a page in length. However it can be summarised as a method of delivering projects aimed at including those that are “hard-to-reach” or “excluded” which are: “designed by the target communities themselves and founded on their participation and control.” The method was a massive success in the last Programme, moved thousands of people out of exclusion and in some cases, without being targeted so to do, outperformed mainstream projects’ employment and skills outputs for “non-excluded” people.

The Third Sector at a National level pushed very hard to reproduce a similar, ring-fenced, Priority for Inclusion in the current Programme but was over-ruled by government with the assurance that the largest (probably worth about £130m in the East Midlands) *Extending Employment Opportunities* Priority would be flexible enough to address the needs for this work.

The 2008-10 Framework

In late Summer 2007 the East Midlands Partnership met to draw up the new Framework and agreed that Community Empowerment should play a prominent part in Priority One of the new Programme. It included the following text in the Framework draft for consultation:

A particular challenge is addressing the needs of those not engaged in the labour market or in those activities close to it especially those recently made redundant as part of the economic downturn. These people are sometimes referred to as “hard to reach” or “excluded”.

A community empowerment approach was developed in the region during the 2000-2006 ESF Programme. Community Empowerment means an integrated set of small and locally-based projects designed by the target communities themselves and founded on their participation and control.



This approach can be effective in engaging those furthest from the labour market through delivering support at grass roots level by community based organisations. It can consist of 3 strands: local social capital development, community based mobilisation and community based employability projects. The community empowerment strategy sees the use of all 3 strands in a planned and co-ordinated manner in communities of place or interest. Some of the indicative activities listed below could use a community empowerment approach, if this is the most appropriate means of addressing needs.

It then framed a question for the consultation asking explicitly **“How significant a part of Priority 1 should this (Community Empowerment) be when it comes to allocating funding?”**

Many will recall the efforts CEFET made to develop a coherent sector response to this question. It organised 5 sub-regional and one Regional event and met with other key groups face-to-face, in addition it consulted with a large number of “Grassroots” groups, the very groups that act as vehicles for participation and control by excluded people themselves. Overall 238 organisations were directly involved in developing a collective response and probably another 100 indirectly.

The resulting collective Third Sector submission was comprehensive, including costings, output-targets and benefit analysis (by KPMG using the Treasury methodology). It proposed an integrated set of actions conforming to the 3-tier model referred to in the Framework. It was supported by National research, evaluations of Community Empowerment actions in the previous programme and a host of other material. It was costed at 12.5% of Priority 1 total funds.

The submission was never considered or reported on by the consultation analysts: being mis-classified by those responsible for the analysis as concerning community **grants!** However this came to light at the final draft stage of the Framework, too late for a re-analysis. The Sector recorded it's refusal to accept or sign off the consultation results and only agreed to the Framework proceeding on the basis of guarantees from the CFOs that they would treat Community Empowerment seriously.

As yet there is no evidence of any Community Empowerment activity taking place within the Programme.

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