

PROGRAMME: A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

This paper is intended to act as a basis for discussion at the Conference on 29 March 1995. Each workshop will be asked to consider and report back on 5 main areas:-

1. Priorities for Funding
2. Structure of the Programme
3. Partnerships/Global Grants
4. Monitoring/Implementation
5. Other major issues raised within the Group

Each of these issues is dealt with in more detail below. It should be noted that, although certain options are outlined, these are illustrative and are put forward to stimulate discussion. Further options may emerge as a result of consultation with interested parties and, subsequently, in negotiation with the Commission.

INTRODUCTION

The special initiative for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland is a unique Community Initiative designed to assist the eligible areas to adjust to the new environment of peace. The initiative follows closely the recommendations of a special Commission Task Force set up in September 1994 to examine practical ways in which the European Union could help to maintain the momentum for peace. It has a central aim of reconciliation and seeks to benefit all communities in a balanced and equitable way, while focusing in particular on those areas and sections of the population suffering the most acute deprivation. In total the initiative is worth 300 mecu (£234m approximately) over three years with the possibility of an extension for a further 2 years subject to a satisfactory review. The Commission will finance up to 75% of the cost of measures under the initiative. It is proposed that up to 80% of the total funding is available for projects in Northern Ireland, not less than 20% for the border counties of Ireland and that at least 15% of the overall amount will be devoted to activities which are carried out in a cross-border context.

Guidelines for the initiative were published on 14 February 1995 setting out the major priorities for action and describing in general terms the administrative arrangement for the package. The Guidelines were sent to conference invitees under cover of Victor Hewitt's minute of 28 February 1995. These Guidelines are still in draft form and the Commission must consult the European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, Economic and Social Committee and a committee representing Member States before the text can be formally approved - probably in May. The normal procedure would then be for the Member States concerned to submit a more detailed Programme within 4 months of formal adoption of the Guidelines.

However, because Government is anxious to ensure that funding starts to flow to projects on the ground as quickly as possible, it has

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initiated a consultation process with a view to being in a position to lodge a Programme as soon as possible after the Guidelines are adopted by the EU authorities - a very tight timescale but one which is necessary to ensure the longest time possible for implementation.

This conference is an opportunity for interested parties to contribute to the formulation of a Programme. They may also wish to submit ideas in response to the advertisement placed in the local press on 16 March. In addition a further opportunity will be provided by the conference planned by the European Parliament.

1. PRIORITIES FOR FUNDING

1.1 A Programme is not a list of projects but rather a document which details central aims, objectives, priorities for funding, selection criteria and implementation/monitoring arrangements. As the Programme will define the eligibility of subsequent projects for assistance, it is clearly an important document. Only when the Programme is negotiated and agreed with the Commission can the Member State and/or other implementing agencies advertise for projects to be submitted.

1.2 The draft Guidelines describe 5 priorities for action in the initiative:-

- employment
- productive investment and industrial development
- urban and rural development
- social inclusion
- cross-border development

Each of these priorities is further sub-divided in the Guidelines into an indicative list of eligible measures.

1.3 Those attending the Conference will be asked to comment on the priorities as listed and identify those measures under their

particular Workshop priority which are considered essential for funding. The balance of funding between the various priorities and measures should also be discussed.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME

2.1 Two basic options for structuring the programme are attached for consideration and by way of illustration. A standard or conventional programme structure is shown at Figure 1 in the annex. In it, each priority is covered by one (or possibly more) sub-programmes which are in turn sub-divided into measures representing, as far as possible, some common theme. The structure of an alternative, more innovative, model is shown at Figure 2 in the annex. This structure focuses on blocks of allocation to, for example, strategic or regional actions and local area actions. For simplicity the diagram shows only two blocks but, in principle, others could be added. In practice the interests of particular groups might be focused much more on one priority than on others, but the structure allows for full participation across the range of priorities. However, any structure which is adopted must accommodate the cross-border element of the Programme.

2.2 These models are by no means the only options for a programme structure and participants are invited to take the paper as the starting point for a discussion of how a programme might be structured.

3. PARTNERSHIPS/GLOBAL GRANTS

3.1 Partnerships. One means of applying the bottom-up approach and ensuring that there is some prioritisation of projects at local level, would be to allocate a block of funding which would be available for use within a specific geographical area - perhaps district council areas. The allocation could be weighted using indicators of deprivation/population in that area. Partnerships (perhaps comprising representatives of councils, the voluntary

sector, the private sector and relevant statutory agencies) might be formed to prioritise local projects which are considered essential for that area. An essential requirement would be that the partnership should be representative of an area.

Grant might be paid direct to those responsible for taking forward projects rather than the partnership. Funding for agreed projects would be available provided certain minimal conditions were fulfilled.

3.2 It should be noted that, as the Member State will be held responsible for ensuring that funding is properly used, appropriate mechanisms would have to be built in to such an approach to conform with EU and Member State accountability requirements.

3.3 Participants are asked to consider whether partnerships might feature in the Programme and, if so, how they might be structured and operate.

3.4 Global Grants. The draft Guidelines allow for the possibility of global grants being given direct to decentralised organisations responsible for implementation and designated by the Member State concerned. The possibility of a number of such grants might be built into the Programme, but for the accountability reasons indicated above, there is a strong case that they should be made available to organisations which can either have a particular responsibility for a specific, eligible function or can represent the whole of the eligible area or possibly a significantly deprived area. The status and capacity of such bodies would likely be a consideration. Bodies administering such a grant would have to advertise for applications, process them, select projects and ensure that they proceeded as planned. This might absorb resources which would otherwise be available for projects. On the other hand, global grants might assist the process of ensuring bottom-up participation in the Initiative.

3.5 Participants are again asked to note the possibility of global grants and to give their views on how they might be utilised in the context of this Programme.

4. MONITORING/IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 The Guidelines state that "the proposals will need to be prepared with the appropriate involvement, possibly in the form of a consultative platform, of local authorities, business, trade unions, community groups and voluntary organisations. Such a mechanism for consultation should continue to have a role during the implementation and follow-up of the Programme".

4.2 Participants are asked to consider and suggest appropriate and workable mechanisms for ensuring that this requirement is met to best effect.

5. OTHER MAJOR ISSUES

Participants should also report back on other issues considered to be significant. In particular, although there is a cross-border working group, this theme might be reported on separately from each working group.

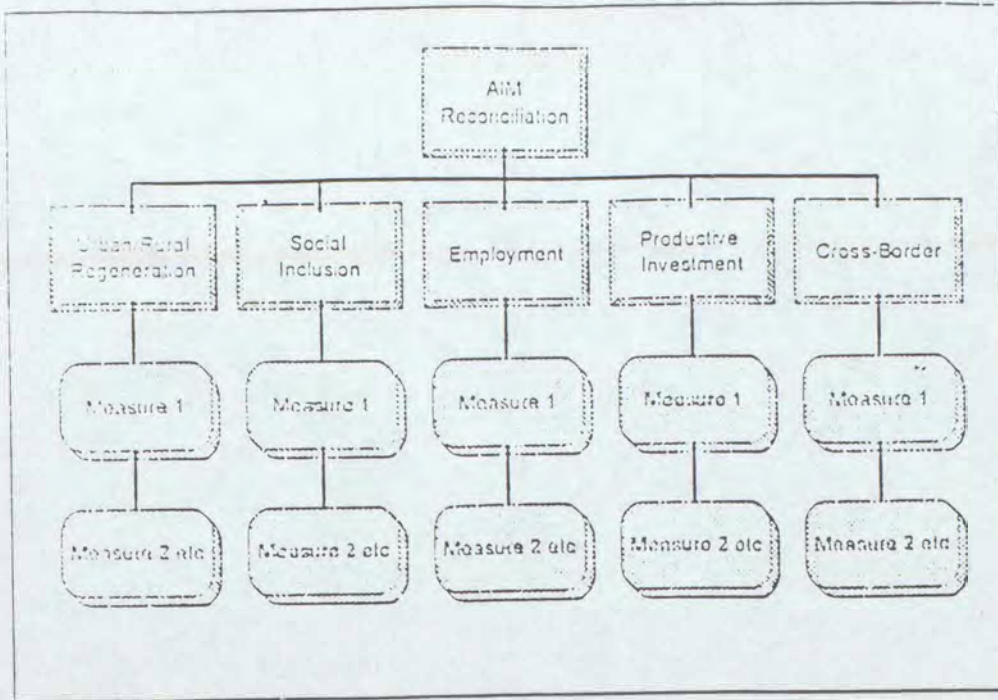


Fig. 1

Conventional Programme Structure

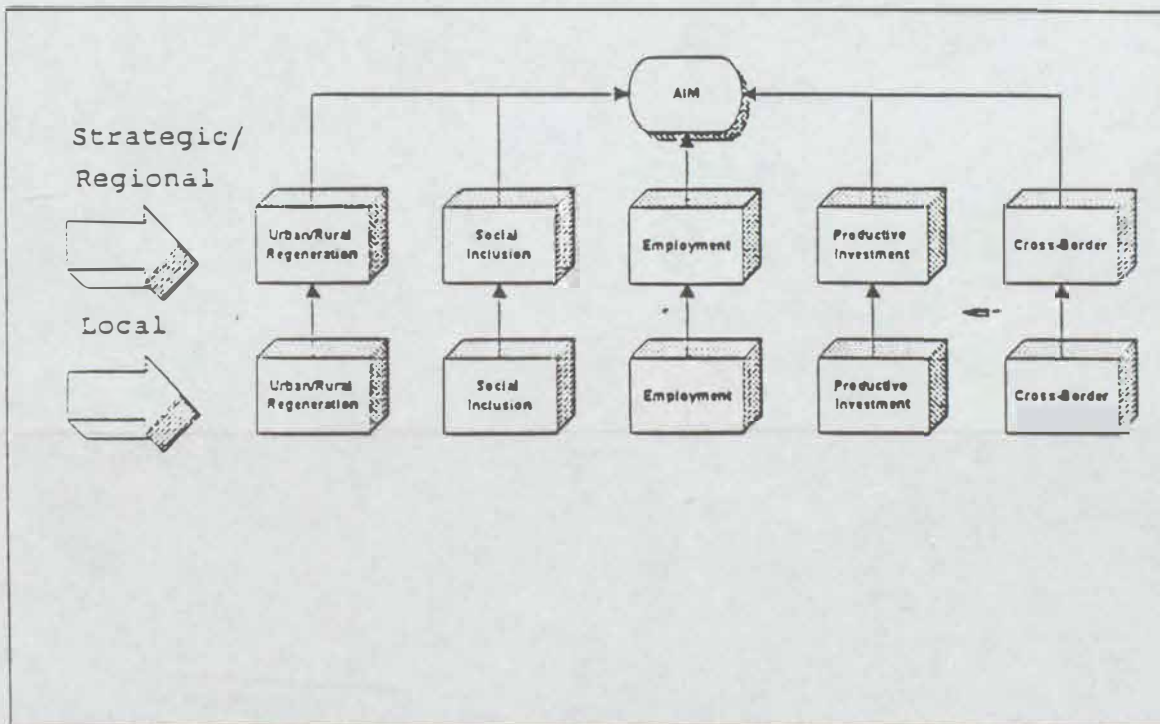


Fig. 2

Alternative Programme Structure

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