



'Partnership for Progress'
Project Evaluation

Executive Summary

December 2006

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The 'Partnership for Progress' Project was awarded £1,056,931 under Measure 4.1 of the Peace II Programme – *Outward and Forward Looking Region*. The Project aimed to (a) deliver a transnational programme involving overseas study tours; (b) undertake research and policy development; and (c) support social partner representatives on Local Strategy Partnerships (LSPs). The Project commenced in July 2003 and was due for completion at the end of December 2006.

1.2 Project Promoters

1.2.1 The Project Promoter is Concordia, a Northern Ireland social partnership that brings together the local business, agricultural, trade union and voluntary and community sectors. It's members are made up of four partner organisations as follows:

- Business – Confederation of British Industry (CBI);
- Agriculture – Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU);
- Trade Union – Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU); and
- Voluntary and Community Sector – Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA).

1.3 Evaluation Methodology

1.3.1 The evaluation, which was conducted during November and December 2006, included the following:

- Desk research and review of documentation relating to the Project;
- Face to face consultations and telephone interviews with Concordia Board members, staff and other key stakeholders; and
- Questionnaire surveys of Project participants.

1.4 Achievement of Project Targets

1.4.1 The Project was successful in achieving the targets in relation to two of the three main aims – the transnational programme and the research and policy work. The targets relating to the third aim, provision of training to social partner representatives on the LSPs, were subject to a Training Needs Analysis (TNA). Whilst training needs were identified from the TNA, many barriers to the potential implementation of the training were highlighted and consequently it was agreed that support for LSPs would be through the other two strands of the Project.

1.4.2 The following table summarises the targets, which were set for the Project and the extent to which these were achieved.

TABLE 1.1		
Achievement of Project Targets		
Output Area	Target	Actual Achieved
Study Tours	378 participants	379
Seminars	28 seminars	28
Joint Policy Papers	7-10 papers	10
Training for LSPs	Training offered to 240 (Subject to TNA)	Training Needs Analysis completed and Support offered through the other two strands of the Project

1.4.3 The success of a Project has to be measured by more than achievement of targets; therefore the impacts of the Project activities were assessed.

1.5 Impact of the Project

1.5.1 By far the most positive outcomes, discernible to date, arise from the Study Tours. These include the following:

- New and improved cross-sectoral working as reported by more than half of the participants;
- Establishment of new networks and contacts, both domestic and overseas;
- The initiation of new joint projects and collaborative working arrangements, both here and abroad; and
- The acquisition of new learning and the widespread dissemination of same was a dominant feature of the Study Tours.

1.5.2 Given that the policy work was undertaken during the latter part of the Project, it is too early to assess its impact. However, the following outcomes were noted:

- The policy documents will be useful to the social partners and other key stakeholders in lobbying government for change.
- The documents effectively form another strand, of a range of interventions, in each of the policy areas, adding to an accumulated effect on each of the issues.
- The media attention that the work was able to capture helped to raise awareness of the various policy issues.
- The strength of the policy work is the united voice of the four social partners, which is more difficult for government to ignore.
- The discussion and debate generated during the process has led to a better understanding of the other partners' perspectives.
- There is evidence of a shift in thinking among some of the social partners in certain strategic and policy areas, which was seen as positive.

Evaluation of 'Partnership For Progress' Project

- From a senior civil servant's perspective, the policy work undertaken by the Project, can effectively act as a filter, with more realistic, practical and workable proposals coming forward, than propositions and requests from individual groups and organisations.

1.5.3 Although it was not possible to deliver training to the LSPs as planned, it was reported that a number of social partner representatives attended seminars delivered through the Project and participated on the Study Tours. Furthermore, research was undertaken during the Project, which examined the impact and experience of the social partners in relation to the Peace II Programme. It was found that social partner representatives contributed the following:

- Their understanding and knowledge of the sector and local area, bringing a greater economic and social focus to the processes;
- A challenge function and additional transparency to the process;
- Greater access to, and buy-in from difficult to reach groups;
- Improved relationships with central and local government, statutory agencies, and elected representatives and better partnership working; and
- Fuller engagement from political representatives from opposing sides of the spectrum.

1.6 Peace Distinctiveness and Horizontal Principles

1.6.1 The Project grew out of the need for participative democracy in a society polarised by decades of conflict, to advance economic and social progress, which was hampered as a result of the Troubles. Therefore, it concurs with the two main aims of the Peace II Programme: *Addressing the Legacy of the Conflict* and *Taking Opportunities Arising from Peace*. Furthermore, given the transnational element to the Project, it is congruent with Measure 4.1 - *Outward and Forward Looking Region*, under which it was funded.

1.6.2 The Project provided opportunities for individuals to come together on a cross-community and cross-sectoral basis to engage in dialogue. It is felt that this has had a positive impact, although, it is acknowledged that the full impact is more likely to emerge in the longer term, following the outcomes of the linkages made among participants and the advancement of the policy papers produced during the Project.

1.6.3 In relation to the Horizontal Principles, the Project has promoted Environmental Sustainability and Rural Development. The policy areas explored during the Project, when advanced, should ultimately contribute to Economic and Social development in the region.

1.7 Challenges

1.7.1 The Project was implemented without any major problems, but it did encounter a few relatively minor challenges, which were largely overcome as follows:

- The over optimistic targets in relation to long term exchanges was overcome by revising the criteria for long term exchanges and re-profiling the other targets and corresponding budgets.
- Barriers to engaging with LSPs were met, therefore, support to the social partner representatives was offered through the other two strands of the Project.
- The staffing structure did not allow for engagement with the individual sectors, as initially envisaged, however, external expertise was bought in, to help fill the gap.

1.8 Limiting Factors

1.8.1 It was more difficult for Trade Union members and individuals from the Business sector to participate on the study tours, consequently, less benefits were gained by these sectors.

1.8.2 It is felt that the policy work may have had more impact had a devolved government been in place during the course of the Project, with whom to engage in dialogue and to drive the agendas forward.

1.8.3 Although there was a delay in the Project start date, it is felt that the Project could have benefited from some time being spent at the outset to plan the implementation, in order to bring a more strategic approach to the thematic areas, to target specific areas and to provide greater cohesion and integration between the strands.

1.9 Financial Performance

1.9.1 Of the £1,056,931 awarded to the Project, £70,000 was decommitted during 2005, due to the difficulty securing sufficient participants to undertake long term study exchanges. The remaining £987k was either spent or committed at the time of the evaluation.

1.9.2 The ratio of 'programme costs' to 'administration costs' of the Project budget was 54% / 46%. However, given the high cost of the study tours, a budget skewed more in favour of 'programme costs' would have been expected. It was reported that the organisation of the study tours was quite labour intensive and that savings were made on Project expenditure where possible.

1.10 Future Needs

1.10.1 Future needs were identified during the evaluation that are relevant to Concordia, including the advancement of the policy documents produced during the Project and the need to pursue other policy areas. A need to progress the implementation of international learning in an organised and systematic manner was also identified. Further development of Concordia itself, as a social partner, was highlighted and it is felt that there is an important role for social partners to work with the new super councils in relation to community planning and community relation.

1.10.2 Overall, Concordia successfully delivered the 'Partnership for Progress' Project with many positive benefits resulting. Each of the partners was highly committed to the Project and they are motivated to continue to develop and promote participative democracy as a means of helping to progress social and economic development in Northern Ireland.