



## Summary Social Economy Conversations

In January and February 2012 the Building Change Trust (the Trust) facilitated a series of seminar and workshop discussions on the social economy. The Trust is interested in the ongoing discussion around the social economy and in knowing what is necessary to stimulate action and growth within it.

The Trust posed a number of questions: Do we need to further develop our skills and capabilities and if yes how? Do we need to make better use of our assets or grow our asset base and if yes how? Do we need to work better to support one another and if yes how?

The seminar and workshop events focussed on how we might promote sustainable social and organisational change; enabling the third sector to lead and deliver transformation at all levels. These events provided an opportunity for practitioners to explore how we as a sector can do more for ourselves, become more self sufficient and entrepreneurial and determine what is required to promote and enhance the sector's effectiveness.

Importantly these events provided everyone with an opportunity to get involved in ideas generation to map out a way forward so we as a sector can work better together.

The seminar focus question for consideration by delegates was;

***How can we work better together to begin to address the key priorities over the next 12/18 months'?***

The supplementary questions to the focus question were;

- 1. To ... PROVIDE MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE BUSINESS SERVICES?** (That is: Do more with fewer resources, including funding & people)
- 2. To ... DEMONSTRATE OUR SOCIAL IMPACT?** (That is: Making the case for the uniqueness of the work of the third sector, what changes are we effecting?)
- 3. To ... MOVING FROM 'ME AND MINE' TO THE 'WE AND TEAM'?** (That is: Overcoming our concern about protecting our organisation and its access to funding, at the expense of delivering better services and supporting one another)

4. **STRENGTHNING FINANCIAL CAPABILITIES?** (That is: Ensuring we have access to finance and the skills and expertise to sustain our organisation/business)
5. To ... **REDUCING OUR DEPENDENCY/STRENGTHENING OUR ASSETS?** (That is: Not looking solely to government and funding bodies but becoming more self sustaining)

Overall, the consensus from the meetings was that organisations recognised the need to drive sector development themselves, co-operatively and collaboratively. There was a clear view that they no longer wanted to wait for government to set its priorities and objectives, but to become more self-reliant, sustainable and resilient.

However it was recognised that it is a key function of government in setting policy objectives and providing continuing support for the social economy sector as a lead agent in delivering government's strategic social and economic aims and objectives.

The emphasis throughout was on what we could do with and for ourselves.

Taking each of the questions in turn, the following summarizes the key points presented.

#### **1. More efficient and effective business services:**

- a) There was clear recognition that there is a role for some of the larger network organisations in this field. For example, it was stated that Volunteer Now could enhance active citizenship engagement opportunities and develop its time bank model for the promotion of volunteer services. Other large organisations could help host and support the activities of smaller organisations.
- b) CO3 could further develop its 'Call for Help' scheme and embed this across the third sector. This should be supplemented by the development of a suite of virtual resources and IT connections to key business development support organisations.
- c) There is a need for a baseline assessment of supports needed and also matched to mentoring support from as outlined in 1b above.
- d) The sector or lead network organisations should engage with academia and others to prepare a resource bank of best practice evidence in efficiency and effectiveness and failure.
- e) To make better use of our asset base and to explore the development of our asset base. To be supported in this by working with organisations with a track record in asset management such as Ortus and Artemis the social enterprise charity.

#### **2. Demonstrate our social impact**

- a) Organisations ultimately to take responsibility for their own impact and to develop an 'Impact Statement' and for greater advocacy on behalf of the sector
- b) Demonstration that impact is meaningful for organisational development and sustainability

- c) Lead organisations/social impact experts such as (but not exclusively) Community Evaluation NI, the Building Change Trust, New Philanthropy Capital and local Universities to work to develop understanding, through seminars & workshops and support embedding of a quality impact standard
- d) Government and its agencies to come to agreement with the CVS and its representatives on impact thresholds in service delivery – to engage with organisations to gain an understanding of local impacts
- e) Development of an agreed number of common impact frameworks between funders, government and the CVS

### **3. Moving from me and mine to we and team**

- a) Continue to build opportunities for more and better collaboration and that policy and funding/project resourcing service agreements emphasise composite and collaborative bids
- b) A significant cultural paradigm shift is necessary and this is something that we need to continue to work at - Encourage culture of sharing. Success builds confidence. Working groups to build relationships. BCT could facilitate 3/4 meetings to kick start the process
- c) A register of who is doing what and where, with a recognition of core competencies held by individual organisations by the CVS and government, its agencies and funding organisations.
- d) The CVS needs to refer and allow others with particular competencies to lead and not generate unnecessary market competition that dilutes the CVS's strengths
- e) The strategic directors of organisation coming together in 'forums' and agreeing 'who' will go for 'what' funding i.e. who has the skills/expertise/experience
  1. The development of hubs of expertise be that in finance, asset management, social enterprise
  2. The development of local area networks

### **4. Strengthening Financial Capabilities**

- a) Develop a strategy for sharing financial skills between organisations at appropriate levels and across geographic locations (could be advanced through 4e)
- b) Board match – bringing professional skills in organisational governance – developing board financial literacy
- c) Continued investment in tiered learning on financial capabilities training
- d) 3rd Sector organisations with financial officers - 'hire out' time to train/up skill those in smaller community orgs or provide training days
- e) BCT to resource various 'known' support groups to come together to further the establishment of S.E. Resource Group as a starting point
- f) Development of a common professional fees register for the CVS
- g) Embed profit making as a key directive for CVS

### **5. Reducing our dependency, strengthening our assets**

- a) Development of centralised services registry and promotion of inter-sectoral trading
- b) As in 1 above – promote active citizenship and develop the CVS volunteer pool

- c) Development and sharing of new business models being advanced across the sector – promoting entrepreneurialism and business/service innovation
- d) For physical assets – learn from others – provision of new management skills, assessment of asset management/transfer/purchase opportunities as well as sharing assets and co-location of organisations and centralised services
- e) Advocacy with funders, government and its agencies on the need for organisations to be profit making and hold reserves

## 6. Other

The overarching comment is on the need to develop a representative network (an advocate) on behalf of those organisations wishing to embrace and enhance their enterprise activity. This should be supported and directly tied in to a series of sub-regional networks across NI. There is a strong desire for local practitioners to engage in local area activity and to lead on local area development and business development opportunities.

This seminar series also asked participants to tell us about their organisation strengths and what their support needs are.

### Organisation Strengths

- Values and principles and commitment to social justice
- Connection to communities of interest and place – client service usage
- Professional expertise and product delivery across a range of service areas inc;
  - Health & social care
  - Childcare development
  - Youth development
  - Education & training
  - Arts & culture
  - Human rights
  - Employment
  - Welfare rights
  - Community relations
  - Environment
- Our people (paid staff and volunteers) – High level skills base
- Our physical assets (the buildings we own and manage)
- Business incubation space
- Longevity
- Governance/Organisational Development/Business Growth
- Collaborative/partnership working
- Merged organisation that understand process and managing merger outcomes
- Strong at networking with other – good representative networks
- Provision of employment and personal development opportunities
- Financial Management/Business Planning/Strategic Management & Marketing
- Impact assessment and evaluation techniques
- Social research – understanding community needs
- Event Management
- Mentoring
- Community development, neighbourhood renewal, social, economic, political and cultural regeneration
- Participative decision making
- User led & owned
- Innovative, adaptive & risk active
- Pool of social investment capital

- Ownership of service specific resources including ICT, training & development and intellectual capital

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### **Organisation Support Needs**

- Governance
- Weak at collaborative engagement
- Procurement for public sector market opportunities
- Service enhancement in existing fields of activity inc;
  - Health & social care
  - Childcare development
  - Youth development
  - Education & training
  - Arts & culture
  - Human rights
  - Employment
  - Welfare rights
  - Community relations
  - Environment
- New business development opportunities/new products/new services/new markets
- Communicating with users and demonstrating impact

- Staff training in business and financial management
- Developing and enhancing volunteer base
- Building stronger local networks with like organisations
- Connecting with the private sector
- Fundraising and funding applications
- Advocacy and policy influence
- Growth, expansion & financial investment
- Regional networking – being part of a representative body
- Space for innovation
- Legal issues inc copyright/patent/ property laws, contracts, shareholder accounting etc
- ICT development & use of
- Scaling up ideas, products & pricing
- Getting existing & new products/services to market
- Knowing what works, understanding best practice

Often where one organisation emphasises business strength there are corresponding organisations for which this is a weakness. This pattern exists across the third sector on a range of competencies from the small scale group to larger voluntary organisations from the local, to the sub-regional and regional, within communities of place and communities of interest. What is evident however is that there is no coherent sector led initiative for the cross fertilisation of strengths to address weaknesses.

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