



Crowe Horwath®



**Final report:
Key Themes Arising from the Consultation Process
with SICAP Stakeholders to Inform the Development
of SICAP 2018-2022**

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**Department of Rural and
Community Development**

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Appendix 1: Focus Group Organisations

Summary of Themes and Solutions Proposed

The following is a summary of the key themes arising from the consultation process, along with the solutions put forward by participants to the issues identified in the discussions. These themes are explored in more depth in the main report; what follows is a synopsis in bullet form of the key elements of the consultations for each of the thematic areas considered.

Strategic Priorities & Programme Framework

- The next iteration of SICAP should have a greater focus on community development and social inclusion
- The next iteration of SICAP should have a reduced focus on activation, with lower targets and a greater focus on more intense support at an earlier stage to progress clients to other activation programmes
- The programme should be designed with a less target-driven approach and any targets should be longer-term and multi-annual. This reduced emphasis on numeric targets should be in favour of outcomes-based measurement
- Design the programme targets with a view to what other agencies and programmes are also seeking to achieve with similar, or the same, clients and be mindful of the activity and behaviour that the targets seek to encourage and influence
- Develop a partnership approach with LCDCs and PIs
- Clarify and strengthen the roles of the LCDCs and support and develop the capacity within LCDCs. The programme should also define the roles and responsibilities of others, including Pobal
- Build in local input and autonomy to the next programme
- Involve LCDCs and others in the identification of needs, setting of targets, and allocation of budgets
- Allow local flexibility in the delivery of the programme and to address local overlaps or conflicts
- The next iteration of the programme should be clearly defined with a separate and distinct purpose from other programmes
- All the terms relating to the programme should be defined. The use of plain English should be central to the programme and acronyms should be kept to a minimum
- The funding Department should work closely across government to align the next programme as far as possible with other national policy and programmes. Linked with this is the need to actively encourage collaboration with other agencies at national and local level
- Build in mechanisms for sharing and learning across the programme

Targets, Outcomes & Indicators

- Develop a performance framework with more emphasis on capturing and reporting on qualitative work and outcomes. Existing models for the capture and recording of

qualitative outcomes in development programmes could form a basis for the development of a model for SICAP

- Reduce quantitative targets and measurement without eliminating this
- Design the targets arising from a clear definition of what is being sought in terms of outcomes
- Targets should be set in consultation with LCDCs in order to identify the most appropriate targets for the needs within the local area. Use a “bottom-up” partnership approach to develop the targets, rather than a prescriptive, “top-down”
- Develop the next programme with some targets set over a longer term to capture progression and development
- The next iteration of SICAP should include some formal needs analysis for defined geographical areas, in order to provide an evidence base for planning and resource allocation for SICAP
- Ensure that the level of administration allowed for in the programme is appropriate to resource the reporting aspects, including qualitative reporting

Beneficiaries & Target Groups

- In the development of the next iteration of SICAP the target groups should be reviewed to ensure the inclusion of those the programme is designed to assist. There is also a need to ensure that the Pobal Deprivation Index is not a barrier to working with those who need assistance
- The provision of some local flexibility regarding target groups should also be assessed
- The next iteration of SICAP needs to ensure that there is a balance between working with individuals and communities
- The registration form should be reviewed to ensure that beneficiaries are only asked to provide information that is necessary
- Reduce the emphasis on numerical targets and give local groups flexibility to develop their own optimum target groups and outcomes – allow more qualitative interventions
- Facilitate staff networking and inter-organisational networking at a local and national level to collaborate and share ideas
- Reduce competition between local implementers rather than increasing it by means of tender-based commissioning, which is seen as hindering innovation by discouraging the sharing of information
- Incorporate ideas around innovation into the core design stage of SICAP
- Provide funding for pilot schemes and other innovations, and reduce penalties for not meeting targets
- Look at what has worked in previous iterations of the programme and how this could address current shortcomings. Also look at what has worked locally and incorporate this into the national programme

Innovation

- Reduce the emphasis on numerical targets and give local groups flexibility to develop their own optimum target groups and outcomes
- Allow for more qualitative interventions and reporting
- Facilitate staff networking and inter-organisational networking at a local and national level to collaborate and share ideas
- Reduce competition between local implementers rather than increasing it by means of tender-based commissioning, which is seen as discouraging the sharing of information
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Funding & Finance

- Provide clarity around what is covered under the administration heading in allocating costs
- Recognise and fund the corporate overheads, management, and governance costs to the PIs in implementing the programme
- Consider the level of funding in relation to staff costs and provide for staff training
- Allow budget flexibility between goals and in relation to other funding allocations
- The new programme should allow for local input to budget-setting for local areas
- Define clearly what the SICAP programme is intended to achieve
- Ensure that SICAP funding does not overlap with other agencies and funding so that there is no duplication and potential waste of scarce funds
- Do not include remedies in the next programme and consider ways to reward and share high performance

Reporting & Administration

- Reduce the administrative workload on PI staff through reducing targets and recording requirements. The focus of workers should be refocused on helping individuals and not hitting targets
- Improve the user friendliness of IRIS, with particular focus on the CRM. Provide adequate IT training for staff, delivered by IT experts
- Provide greater flexibility in how staff can report and record their work
- Provide a baseline budget for IT training which is specifically funded by the programme
- Review the categorisation of target groups to ensure that no groups are 'left behind'
- Provide greater local flexibility to ensure that each group's unique circumstances can be addressed

1 Introduction

1.1 Preamble

This report summarises the discussions and opinions arising from a consultation process on the future of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), comprising four national and regional consultation events, two online surveys, and four focus groups. Approximately 730 people engaged with the process through the various engagement processes.

1.2 Overview of the Process

1.2.1 Purpose

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government and Pobal sought to engage an independent facilitator in order to facilitate the consultation sessions and provide an environment in which participants could openly discuss any issues. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government at the time had responsibility for SICAP; however, a new Department of Rural and Community Development was subsequently established. SICAP now comes under the auspices of this Department, and all responsibility for the Programme rests with it. Hence, throughout the report, we will refer to the Department of Rural and Community Development rather than the Department formerly responsible for SICAP.

Following a competitive tender process, Crowe Horwath was contracted to facilitate the consultations and to prepare a full report (and summary thereof) feeding back the consultation findings, which would be used by the Department and Pobal to inform the design of the successor SICAP programme. The consultation process was structured to give participants an opportunity to discuss any perceived issues with the current programme and put forward ideas for the development of the next iteration of the programme, SICAP 2018-2022. Utilising the resources of an independent facilitator ensured that there was a greater level of objectivity. It should be noted that this process was not an evaluation of the current SICAP programme. Separate pieces of work have been undertaken by others in relation to evaluating the current programme.

1.2.2 National Consultation Event

A national SICAP consultation event was held in Dublin Castle on 24 February 2017. Approximately 130 people attended, which comprised an opening session with input from the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Minister of State for Communities and Drugs, Catherine Byrne T.D., and from Crowe Horwath. Following this, attendees were split into breakout groups to discuss a series of key thematic areas relating to SICAP. These sessions were followed by a reportage by participants from each breakout group and a plenary discussion. Attendees primarily consisted of

representatives from Programme Implementer organisations, members of Local Community Development Committees, and local authority support staff.

1.2.3 Regional Consultation Events

Following the national event, further consultation events were held in Sligo, Cork, and Dublin (on 10, 24, and 29 March 2017 respectively). The Sligo event had approximately 65 attendees; 52 people attended the Cork session; and the Dublin regional event had approximately 74 participants. The regional events were conducted in a similar fashion to the national event; however, owing to lower numbers, the sessions considered two thematic areas each rather than a single discussion topic. Attendees primarily consisted of representatives from Programme Implementer (PI) organisations, members of Local Community Development Committees (LCDGs), and support staff from the local authorities.

1.2.4 Surveys

Pobal conducted two online surveys, one directed at Programme Implementers and LCDGs, and one at a wider range of stakeholders. The former survey had 62 completed responses from PIs and LCDGs, and the latter survey elicited 195 responses from stakeholder organisations, mostly local community organisations and groups.

The results of the surveys were analysed on a thematic basis and have been used to inform this final report.

1.2.5 Focus Groups

In addition, focus groups were held with four cohorts of stakeholders:

- Representatives from the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal, in respect of their roles in designing, implementing, funding, and overseeing the SICAP programme;
- Stakeholders from statutory and other agencies involved in employment, education, and enterprise;
- Representatives from the community development and social inclusion sectors;
- SICAP beneficiaries.

For the list of organisations which attended these focus groups, see Appendix 1.

1.3 Development of the Final Report

This report to the Department of Rural and Community Development and Pobal combines the outputs from all of the above consultations and presents the findings thematically. The report is structured along the same key areas as used in the Pobal

surveys and the various breakout sessions in the national and regional consultation events, as follows:

- Strategic priorities and programme framework
- Targets, outcomes, and indicators
- Beneficiaries and target groups
- Innovation
- Funding and finance
- Reporting and administration

The key findings are set out with analysis of the relative importance or priority given to them by consultation participants.

1.4 Content of this Report

The primary purpose of this report is to summarise the main issues reported to Crowe Horwath during an extensive consultation programme. Providing consultees with the opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions relating to the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme 2015-2017 in an open and frank manner was a key part of this assignment, and it is important that this combined body of opinion is put forward fairly and in a manner which captures the true essence of this opinion. Some of the views and suggestions made by consultees may be at variance with other opinions within this report; this is to be expected.

Crowe Horwath has not attempted to reword the feedback presented, except for normal editorial reasons. Pobal and the Department have provided feedback to draft versions of the report and provided clarifications to a number of points raised in the report in the form of footnotes.

It is necessary to note that the priorities of SICAP itself, as the programme currently exists, were formulated in 2014 and as such were in response to the specific economic situation of that time. For example, unemployment in the first quarter of that year was around 12% and thus there was a strong emphasis on activation.

It is important to point out that through the course of the consultation process positive comments were made about SICAP, with it generally being seen as a key social inclusion programme at local level. However, due to the nature of this report the main emphasis is on aspects of the programme that are considered to be problematic or in need of strengthening and this is the focus of this consultation report.

The views, opinions and suggestions of consultees presented in this report are not those of Crowe Horwath. Our job has been to ask the questions, probe the responses, and capture fairly the feedback received so that it can be considered by the Department, Pobal, and other stakeholders as they prepare for the next iteration of SICAP.



Crowe Horwath would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who participated in the consultation process. The participation and contribution from all concerned was much appreciated and provided valuable insight to inform the development of this report.

2 Strategic Priorities & Programme Framework

2.1 Greater Focus on Social Inclusion and Community Development

An important theme emerging from the consultations in relation to the strategic priorities for SICAP in future was the perception that the current programme does not have enough of a focus on social inclusion and community development. For many of the participants, there was a desire to see community development at the heart of the programme. It was felt by many that despite the word “community” in the title of SICAP, the programme did not have the right balance across the goals to the detriment of Goal 1.

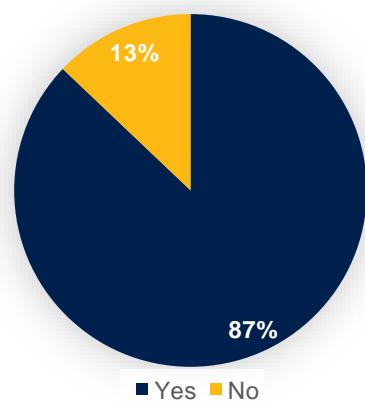
As an example of the strength of feeling, in the survey of PIs and LCDCs 57 of the 62 responses (87%) indicated that they would like to see the SICAP goals refined, as illustrated in the chart to the right.

Participants expressed a desire to see more focus on the development of capacity within communities, and to recognise and address the structural factors in social exclusion and unemployment, rather than being overly focused on working with individuals in a way that some consider disconnected from community issues. Some considered that the current programme has more focus on individuals than community and groups and that the community development in the forthcoming programme should be broadened and strengthened.

Individual work was seen as very important and there was a strong desire to maintain this; however, participants also recognised the structural factors arising from the community within which an individual is living. Participants want to maintain a balance between individual, group, and community work with SICAP without losing too much of any one aspect.

It was suggested that the next iteration of SICAP should aim for a better sense of “working with” the community as opposed to solely providing a “service” to individuals. Participants had concerns that issues such as mental health and rural isolation have been less well addressed by the current SICAP programme. There was also concern in relation to community capacity to support these and, for example, the integration of new communities, especially into smaller communities, and those with disabilities and/or mental health difficulties moving into community rather than congregated settings. It was felt that the importance of strong local

Should SICAP Goals be Refined?



community groups was crucial in relation to social inclusion, and therefore that the next SICAP programme should support this community development work appropriately: it should “relook at the preventative work at the centre of programme”.

Some noted that the issue of overlap with other agencies and programmes was less of a factor in relation to community development because in disadvantaged areas, there was very little “competition” in respect of this kind of work. Others noted that in their view, SICAP focused on “economic solutions to social inclusion”, whereas it was felt that community capacity building and resilience was crucial in social inclusion. Participants were keen to include community capacity-building and support in the programme as it was seen as critical to addressing factors impacting on individuals’ experiences and progress.

Some felt that there was an undervaluing of community work, which was seen by many as a key way of engaging communities. There were comments that more staff resources in the form of community development workers were required, and that staff involved in the delivery of SICAP were under a lot of pressure and were leaving the programme to work with organisations who do “real community development work”.

There were some mixed experiences and opinions: for example, there was a comment to the effect that Goal 1 can be limited in what can happen – if a community group does not want training then there is very little SICAP can do, whereas in some groups it was stated that Goal 1 should underpin all work done under SICAP.

Some discussion arose within one focus group concerning the nature of “community” and the difficulty in defining and measuring the strength or otherwise of a community. Community can mean different things to different people, and it can be considered from the perspective of geographic communities and from communities of interest, i.e. those who share particular issues, concerns, or challenges. Whilst there is benefit according to some participants in working with communities of interest, this can have the downside of “labelling” or stigmatising people for what may be temporary issues.

Importance of the theme *Greater Focus on Social Inclusion and Community Development:*

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- The next iteration of SICAP to have a greater focus on community development and social inclusion

2.2 Reduction in Focus on Activation/Goal 3

A key issue repeatedly raised throughout the consultation was the perception that – in the context of improving economic circumstances in the last few years – there is now an imbalance or inappropriate level of focus on Goal 3, i.e. employment activation. As discussed elsewhere, concerns around the balance across the goals of the programme were a common theme, with many wishing to see a reduction in the focus on and targets for activation and an increased emphasis on social inclusion and community development: “the programme needs to be a social inclusion programme rather than an activation programme”.

Whilst this was a predominant view, it was by no means universal: consultees in certain parts of the country reported that the economic recovery had largely “bypassed” their communities and that unemployment was still a persistent problem, meaning that programmes such as SICAP are highly valued for their capacity to help people to gain employment. These consultees typically felt that the balance of the next iteration of SICAP should not be switched to a heavier emphasis on social inclusion.

The issue of what many perceived to be an over-emphasis within SICAP on activation was a constant theme within the consultations. There were a number of different perspectives on this: for example, many pointed out that there are existing activation programmes with which SICAP was in some areas overlapping and indeed competing; it was indicated that the fall in unemployment meant that targets were more difficult to achieve and were now out of line with the actual needs in relation to Goal 3; and that a focus on employment risked being too narrow in terms of individuals’ progression in relation to social exclusion.

Participants were generally keen to see a role for SICAP in progressing people towards employment, but not necessarily by moving large numbers of individuals into jobs. Several contributions emphasised a preferred role in relation to working with those most distant from the labour market in order to progress them to a situation where they could then participate in activation programmes delivered by other programmes and agencies.

There was a sense that while SICAP has been effective in labour activation, it has been competing with dedicated activation programmes which have greater resources to focus on this area. This suggestion was made a number of times, arising from concerns expressed in most if not all sessions that there are already several activation programmes and organisations involved in delivering them. There was a perception among participants that SICAP was effectively competing in relation to delivering on the activation targets, and that there were issues with double-counting of clients in relation to participation in such programmes.

The changing economic environment and its impact on jobless numbers was brought up repeatedly, with participants concerned that the target levels set within SICAP were at a perceived high level relative to the declining numbers of those in

unemployment, and the higher needs of those remaining without employment. It was suggested in many of the consultations that those being “left behind” by the economic recovery were those most in need of intervention, but that working with such individuals required a level of input and intensity that was difficult to deliver in a quantitative target-driven programme as SICAP is perceived to be. Participants suggested that the labour activation element reflected another time and that it required updating.

Another key issue raised was the issue of the quality of employment available and being accessed by some: the concern for many is that not all employment necessarily resolves many social inclusion issues nor contributes to wellbeing, and that the tendency towards low-paid, unskilled, insecure employment with, for example, zero-hour or casual contracts did not necessarily represent a long-term solution to social inclusion issues. Some discussed the impact such employment can have on quality of life, instability, and lack of security of income and the potential impact on affording rent, for example. It was suggested that a role for SICAP in future might include the capacity to have continuity of support for people as they move into their early stages of employment.¹

This support was also suggested in relation to the challenges for some in staying in employment once they have secured it. This was raised as an issue for some clients, who may not have had much, or indeed any, previous employment and might therefore struggle to adapt to a working life. There were additional concerns about the capacity of some to stay in employment for reasons such as access to transport, access for those with disabilities, childcare availability and so forth. A role for SICAP in ensuring that those who have progressed to employment can and do stay in work was suggested in this context.

Conversely there were concerns that a perceived over-emphasis on the importance of employment in social inclusion could overlook the progress which marginalised or excluded individuals might make without having secured employment, in terms of social engagement, inclusion, participation, etc. Whilst it was recognised that such progression is difficult to measure and was very individual, it was also considered important by many contributors. This issue was extended to those who for particular reasons might be incapable of securing employment, such as those with certain levels of disability. Concerns were expressed that an undue focus on employment might lead to the programme not meeting the needs of those in such situations.

It was suggested that a quality of life indicator should be a target, arising from the concern that the progress of bringing people into active engagement and participation

¹ Pobal provided the following clarification: Activities to support people as they move into employment and people who are in employment are eligible under SICAP. Much of this work occurs with the target group ‘low income workers/households’ – people who are employed but experiencing hardship due to low income levels or in precarious employment. In 2016, low income workers made up 12% of the programme caseload. People who are members of other target groups may also be in employment and can be assisted under SICAP.

in their community and improvements in their quality of life was being overlooked if the individuals did not access employment.

Importance of the theme *Reduction in Focus on Activation/Goal 3:*

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- The next iteration of SICAP to have a reduced focus on activation, with lower targets and a focus on more intense support at an earlier stage to progress clients to other activation programmes

2.3 Structures and Framework

The structures and delivery mechanisms for SICAP were raised in all discussions regarding the future programme. A number of issues were raised in this regard, with particular emphasis on the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) structures and the relative roles of the various stakeholders.

A commonly suggested theme was the strong desire for a partnership model, akin to LEADER, where the LCDCs are integral in setting priorities and agreeing targets, which also means more ownership and accountability for targets. There was widespread opposition to the current model of “sub-contracting”/“service-delivery agent” roles for LCDCs and PIs. PIs and LCDCs expressed a preference for a partnership approach with more weight and credit given to the local structures in terms of their capacity to deliver on the aims of the programme.

Participants felt strongly that the role of the LCDCs in the oversight of SICAP needed clarification and additional authority and autonomy. However, it was recognised that there were variations in the capacity of LCDCs across the different regions and that the structures themselves were relatively new with the members of LCDCs adapting to and learning in relation to their role. Some suggested that LCDCs were tasked with managing too many programmes, increasing pressure on resources and capacity within them.

Several contributions raised the question as to the envisaged role for LCDCs when they were established, given their lack of participation in the development of SICAP at local levels and perceived lack of input to priority-setting and targets for their local areas. LCDCs have to hold PIs to account for delivering on a programme that may not be targeting the local needs in the most appropriate way. As commented in one session, “If LCDCs have no role in setting targets and identifying local priorities and needs, why are they there?” Some perceived that the development of the LCDCs had served to distance the Programme Implementers (PIs) from the Department and from Pobal. This was not perceived as a positive move by many, some of whom

expressed a desire to see Pobal's role in SICAP increased in terms of direct engagement with and support for PIs.

One issue raised in relation to the structures and operation of the programme was that of participation and local democracy. Some participants questioned the representation of beneficiaries on LCDCs and/or sub-groups, raising the question of the inclusivity of the Public Participation Networks and whether target groups for SICAP were adequately represented on the Boards of the PPNS.² A lack of consultation with beneficiaries on the ground was felt to be a concern.

Relating to the partnership approach sought by participants as discussed above, many sought clarity on commissioning for the next iteration of SICAP: for many, the commissioning model undermines any concept of partnership working in the delivery of SICAP and reduces LCDCs and PIs to service delivery agents. Whilst the commissioning issue was not explicitly raised by the facilitators in this consultation process, it was a common concern raised by participants as a key aspect of how they would like to see SICAP moving forward.

Importance of the theme *Structures and Framework*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Develop a partnership approach with LCDCs and PIs
- Clarify and strengthen the roles of the LCDCs
- Support and develop the capacity within LCDCs

2.4 Local Autonomy and Flexibility

A fundamental concern expressed at every consultation event was the desire to see more local flexibility and autonomy within the SICAP programme. Participants believe that there is a body of knowledge and experience within the PIs and LCDCs regarding the key needs and priorities within their local areas, and that this should be utilised to support and strengthen the implementation and impact of SICAP in those areas.

The flexibility that participants would like to see includes a number of facets. A key desire is that of flexibility between the different SICAP goals depending on the profile and needs of the local area. For example, in areas with several other programmes offering activation, or where unemployment is less of a concern in relation to social inclusion, participants would like the capacity to reduce the resources and targets under Goal 3 in favour of work under the other goals.

²

The structure of PPNS is outside the remit of the consultation process and this report.

Flexibility around target groups was another key area of concern: many participants would like to see more capacity to identify those in the local area with key needs in relation to social inclusion support and work with them, rather than with top-down, pre-set target groups. There was a strong theme that SICAP should comprise “local responses to local needs”, with local needs and priorities being determined on a “bottom-up” rather than “top-down” basis.

A key issue for most if not all participants was the setting of SICAP targets on a local rather than a national basis: there was considerable concern at the determination of local targets within SICAP with no input from or consultation with LCDCs or PIs in respect of the appropriateness of such targets to the needs of the local area.

Stakeholders wish to see a process in the next programme that allows for a consultative approach to setting SICAP targets locally.

Closely related to this flexibility is the desire to see more autonomy and authority delegated to LCDCs (or local areas by some mechanism), to enable such flexibility to be exercised. A particular issue raised throughout the consultations was the perception that LCDCs are tasked with overseeing the implementation of SICAP and holding the PIs to account for the delivery of targets that the LCDCs have had no part in setting. It was felt by many that this meant LCDCs have a significant responsibility without the autonomy and authority to tailor the programme to the needs and issues within their local areas. Consequently, a common request in relation to the programme design in future was to develop a mechanism for local priority-setting and target-setting.

One key aspect of the calls for local flexibility and autonomy is the perceived differences between rural and urban areas and the challenge in addressing what may be quite different local needs using a prescribed and inflexible approach. It was raised frequently at events, especially those based outside Dublin, that rural areas have particular issues and concerns which many felt the SICAP programme, as it is currently implemented, did not adequately address. Many suggested that a more locally-based, bottom-up approach to identifying key needs and setting targets would enable such differences in relation to urban and rural needs to be better addressed in the next programme.

Another aspect of flexibility is the capacity that many participants would like to see in relation to changing needs over the course of the programme. An example frequently given was the changing economic circumstances reducing the local need for activation programmes given the drop in unemployment, and a perceived lack of capacity within SICAP to be flexible in refocusing resources originally allocated to this work on other interventions instead. Another commonly cited issue was that of immigration, with migrant flows sometimes putting pressure on local communities; the moving of people with disabilities and/or mental health difficulties into community-based settings was another. These were all considered to be key changes that can impact on communities and individuals within the lifetime of a programme such as SICAP, with the resultant wish to have more capacity within the programme to be able to respond to changing local needs as they arise.

Local autonomy or flexibility was also sought in relation to budgetary allocation: that budgets for local areas (mindful of the constraints of the overall programme budget) could be set in consultation with the LCDCs, in tandem with targets and local priorities. This further reflects the overall concern with a perceived top-down approach where local budgets, targets, and priorities are set from “the top” rather than based on an assessment of the needs and issues in local areas.

Importance of the theme *Local Autonomy and Flexibility*:

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Build in local input and autonomy to the next programme
- Involve LCDCs and others in the identification of needs, setting of targets, and allocation of budgets
- Allow local flexibility in the delivery of the programme

2.5 Clarity in Relation to SICAP

SICAP’s specific role relative to other national and local programme and supports was a common theme in the consultations. As mentioned elsewhere, there are concerns by participants that the work supported by SICAP in relation to activation and education in some areas can overlap with and potentially duplicate that being undertaken by other agencies or programmes. This led many contributors to request that a very clear role and purpose be defined for SICAP in its next iteration, with particular focus on what SICAP is there to achieve that is different from and separate to what is being addressed in other ways.

This concern is related to the desire among many participants to “refocus” (as they perceive it) the SICAP programme on core areas of social inclusion and community development. It was also closely allied to the issue of a decline in the numbers of those in unemployment, thereby conceivably reducing the requirement for SICAP to continue to focus on this area. This would necessitate a fresh definition and specification as to the nature and purpose of the programme.

Participants were mindful of the limited resources available under the SICAP programme. Whilst many of the themes discussed include aspects participants wished to see expanded (such as the target groups, the geographic areas, etc.), it was felt on the other hand that SICAP needed to be focused on a core set of aims and desired outcomes rather than trying to do too much. This was especially emphasised in the context that many considered SICAP activity to be duplicating, competing with, or overlapping in some way with the work of other agencies, which to some felt like a waste of the programme’s scarce resources.

Suggested roles for SICAP in a complementary role to other programmes and agencies included some of the following:

- Outreach and engagement with those in marginalised circumstances, and then working with the providers of services to address the needs, rather than trying to provide the latter services directly;
- Integration into the community of different groups such as ex-offenders; people with disabilities; new communities; etc.;
- Early-stage intensive work with those most distant from the education and labour market (those with the most complex needs and therefore the most difficult to progress directly) in order to prepare them for progression into education and activation services provided by other organisations.

It was felt by many participants that the starting point for the next iteration of SICAP should be a “back to basics” review of what the programme is seeking to address and the outcomes it is looking to achieve: according to some, there is a need to define/clarify “poverty” and “social exclusion” in today’s context, and to address the following fundamental questions and issues:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How will we know we are impactful?
- How do we best ensure that we are impactful?
- Avoid duplication of efforts;
- Reflect the reality of how change happens;
- Modify the resource allocation model (given the reality that many in poverty or who are socially excluded are not in social housing or in defined geographic areas of deprivation).

Contributors felt that there was a need to redefine what SICAP’s next programme would be about and, critically, to build appropriate indicators. Many recognised that the programme had good priorities “on paper” but that in practice the clarity around the implementation was not there. Some of this arose from a perceived lack of clarity around some of the terms used within SICAP, with some participants suggesting that these needed to be clearly defined in the context of the programme, such as social inclusion, community support. Some questioned whether the implementation of SICAP was actually reflecting definitions that all stakeholders understand in the same way. Similarly, other comments included a request to clarify “implicit assumptions” in SICAP that underpin the approach.

This concern around clarity relates closely to the issues around the roles of the various actors within the programme, such as the remit and responsibilities of LCDCs, Pobal, and so on. Participants are keen to see a much more closely and clearly defined programme for the next iteration.

Importance of the theme *Clarity in Relation to SICAP*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- The next iteration of the programme should be clearly defined with a separate and distinct purpose from other programmes
- The programme should define the roles and responsibilities of the LCDCs and others, including Pobal
- All the terms relating to the programme should be defined

2.6 Better Collaboration with Other Agencies Locally and Nationally

Allied to contributors' concern that SICAP may be overlapping with the work of other programmes and agencies is the desire to see a more collaborative and co-ordinated approach to working with other agencies, both on a local and national level.

For many participants this issue is one that relates to a desire to see a more cohesive cross-governmental approach to programmes and funding, whereby national policy would be complementary instead of, in some cases, conflicting, and agencies would have clarity around their relative roles and priorities. This is evidently a challenge that the next iteration of SICAP will not be able to address by itself, something recognised by participants. However, it is clear that there is a general concern about the difficulties that can arise when agencies and programmes are in competition or where the aims of one impact in some way on another. One example put forward is the policy to secure social housing for those in need in a variety of areas from a socio-economic perspective, i.e. to house people in "well-off" areas to attempt to reduce ghettoisation of those with lower incomes or social deprivation. This policy then may mean that those who would benefit from SICAP support could be precluded from the programme on the basis of their address in an area that is not high enough on the Deprivation Index. Other examples include several instances where participants considered there to be competition between local agencies for clients in relation to activation or training initiatives.

Participants would like to see collaboration with other agencies improved at local and national levels, with a consequent reduction in duplication and redundancy of services and resources through increased inter-agency co-operation. There was a concern that, notwithstanding the good work SICAP has been doing, it cannot do all things for all people and as such should be pursuing focused goals in collaboration with and as a complement to other agencies.

Some perceived the LCDCs as a mechanism to bring together different organisations and stakeholders in a way that could be harnessed to increase co-operation and cohesiveness of approach in local areas. A suggestion was made in respect of the potential to align the interventions and supports available in local areas from multiple agencies and organisations, making better use of the multi-stakeholder LCDC structure to achieve this. However, this is linked with the desire to see the flexibility and autonomy for local areas that would be needed in order for this to be implemented, i.e. LCDCs would need the capacity to be able to determine the most

appropriate relative roles and activities for the different agencies in the local area. The structure of LCDCs might require review and adaptation to maximise the inter-agency benefits: it was commented that the absence of the HSE, for example, on LCDCs left an information and policy gap that was detrimental.³

At a national level, more formal and strategic links between Departments, agencies, and programmes was a clear desire of many participants. This co-operation and communication would be beneficial, it was felt, to have better co-ordination of policy and implementation. Another key concern was the capacity to learn from other programmes and agencies, and how such learning could be captured and shared. For example, the use of nationally captured data from a range of other programmes, interventions, and supports could be useful to the next SICAP programme in terms of identifying key issues, and would also be helpful to LCDCs and PIs.

Participants also suggested that there should be a clear alignment of SICAP's goals and targets with national and European targets, and with, for example, the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), which some perceived were not well-aligned with SICAP locally.

It was commented that the nature of social inclusion implied working in partnership across a number of areas, and that the design of SICAP did little to support this, with metric-based targets making it challenging to capture or value such collaborative approaches. It was suggested that the current SICAP programme was "too rigid" and does not value partnership or collaboration.

The collaboration and communication encouraged by participants for the next programme is not limited to other agencies or programmes: it was suggested that within SICAP, more collaboration and sharing of learning and expertise could be encouraged between LCDCs and between PIs to reduce the need to "reinvent the wheel" at a local level.

Importance of the theme *Better Collaboration with Other Agencies Locally and Nationally:*

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- The Department to work closely across government to align the next programme as far as possible with other national policy and programmes
- Allow flexibility at local level to address local overlaps or conflicts
- Design the programme targets with a view to what other agencies and programmes are also seeking to achieve with similar or the same clients
- Build in mechanisms for sharing and learning across the programme

³ Note that the membership of the LCDCs was outside the scope of the consultation process and this report.

- Actively encourage collaboration with other agencies at national and local level

2.7 A Less Target-Driven Approach

Whilst the issues relating to targets, outcomes, and indicators are addressed in Section 3, there were some discussions on a more strategic level about the perceived target-driven nature of SICAP as it is currently structured. Overall, significant concern was expressed at the heavy emphasis on quantitative metric-based targets. A strong desire for an approach that encompasses a different set of targets and measurements for success was expressed across all consultations in this process.

One aspect of this concern was the failure, in participants' eyes, to capture the intensity of the work undertaken within SICAP, and to recognise the necessity of such intense work with those who are most in need of intervention and support. A perceived "rigid, narrow minded target approach" needs changing, according to participants: quality of the work is not being captured at present and the value to individuals, communities, and society of the work that is being done is not credited. There is a desire to work more intensively with those needing most support rather than trying to meet larger numerical targets with more "shallow" interventions. Participants wish to see an approach to the next programme that is focused on outcomes rather than outputs and which develops measurement mechanisms that seek to determine the quality as well as the quantity of work.

Another key concern was that a new programme should consider the long-term approaches needed to effect change. Contributors felt that the current approach made it difficult to work over a longer term whilst meeting high annual targets. It was suggested that the next programme should have aims over a longer term with ways to measure the progression of individuals and communities over time periods longer than the current systems capture.

It was emphasised in many engagements that participants do not wish to do away with measurements or targets entirely, but that a different approach would be desirable that seeks to capture the qualitative aspects of the work. This would be an approach which measures outcomes, and that recognises where and how intense support or intervention has been necessary to bring about the desired results.

Concern was expressed that such recording, reporting, and measurement would require additional resources. From the outset, this new programme should in its design recognise the need for adequate resources to support the capture and reporting of programme activity and outcomes.

A less target-driven approach to the design of the next SICAP programme would, it was suggested, enable the programme to focus on doing more with fewer people, targeting those most in need, and providing them with intensive supports to enable

them to progress. It was felt that “pre-development” (i.e. working with people at a stage before they are ready for learning or activation) is being left behind to meet high level priorities, with the importance of engagement in the first instance not recognised.

Many participants noted that the “design of the programme is great” but that the focus on quantitative measures and administrative reporting was undermining it. It was suggested that the implementation and operation of the programme can be tokenistic and is geared towards meeting targets, which it was felt was not the ultimate intention of the programme. Participants expressed a desire to work with a programme that embraced the principles of SICAP but with a different strategic approach to targets and measurement.

Importance of the theme *A Less Target-Driven Approach:*

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Design the programme with a less target-driven approach
- Reduce the emphasis on numeric targets in favour of outcomes-based measurement
- Be mindful of the activity and behaviour that the targets seek to encourage and influence
- Design the programme with longer-term, multi-annual targets

3 Targets, Outcomes, & Indicators

3.1 Qualitative versus Quantitative Targets

A critical concern expressed by participants across the consultation process was the view that the targets set within the SICAP programme are too heavily focused on quantitative outputs. There was a strong desire among contributors to see the next programme move towards capturing and reporting on more qualitative, outcomes-based indicators of success.

Whilst participants recognised the need for some quantitative metrics in relation to recording and reporting on activity, it was widely felt that this failed to capture or recognise the value of much of the programme's work. Many suggested that the nature of a social inclusion programme meant that individual and community progress could be difficult to express in numeric terms and that more nuanced qualitative measurement mechanisms were needed: "there needs to be a reduction in quantitative targets and inclusion of qualitative indicators, which are designed from a client perspective and recognise that beneficiaries are on a journey". Several felt quite strongly that the quantitative nature of the targets was unsuited to capturing social inclusion work; indeed, one comment suggested that exclusively focusing on meeting numeric targets was the "antithesis" of social inclusion.

It was recognised by participants that designing a qualitative, outcomes-based framework to improve the capture of such information would be challenging, and some suggestions were made as to ways in which qualitative data could be recorded and reported on. A key concern of participants was finding ways to "humanise" the numbers for the programme and to enable much of the community development work to be more accurately reflected. Suggestions for ways to capture qualitative elements of the programme included:

- illustrative and/or thematic case studies;
- measuring motivation levels and progression before, during, and after interventions;
- using "evolutionary" indicators, reflecting a person's journey on an individual basis but based on common social inclusion needs;
- using logic models based on a clear "theory of change", with clear desired outcomes.

Participants suggested that future targets should focus on the needs of the client, using a more sophisticated measurement system to measure the progress of individual clients based on outcomes and change achieved rather than predominantly on numbers.

The development of qualitative indicators, whilst a clear desire, was also acknowledged as something the PIs and LCDCs would need to learn to work with and would require guidance, training, and resources to implement. The capacity

within the current programme framework to record and report on significant additional material was considered inadequate. There was recognition that both current and potential future reporting mechanisms are burdensome.

The use of quantitative measurements and targets was seen as problematic not just from the perspective of failing to capture outcomes and the quality of work with individuals and communities, but also because numeric targets incentivises the wrong kinds of activity within the programme. For example, it was felt that it encouraged “shallow” work with many individuals rather than “deep” work with those most in need. It was suggested that in some cases the drive to meet high numeric targets incentivised work with the “easier” cohorts, i.e. those with lower needs who were most likely to make rapid progression, instead of continuing to provide support and intervention to the harder cases whose progress was likely to be slower. This reduces the apparent success of the programme when measured by numbers of individuals.

Overall, there was a view that a more holistic approach is needed to measurement and there was more or less full consensus on a need for qualitative indicators over quantitative indicators, or certainly to complement quantitative indicators.

Importance of the theme *Qualitative versus Quantitative Targets*:

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Development of a performance framework with more emphasis on capturing and reporting on qualitative work and outcomes
- Reduce quantitative targets and measurement, without eliminating this entirely

3.2 Targets Based on Desired Outcomes

Related to the above was the concern that the targets and indicators were driving the programme design rather than following it. Participants perceived that in some cases the limitations of IRIS (the Integrated Reporting and Information System) and reporting mechanisms were determining what information was being prioritised for capture and reporting; that this was influencing what types of targets were being chosen, and consequently driving the activity within the programme.

There was a view that to be truly effective the programme needs to move away from a top-down to a bottom-up approach to achieve the community development horizontal principles. It was felt that it should also highlight the themes within the annual planning targets, and provide a feedback mechanism to monitor the horizontal themes through developing standard qualitative measurements such as “before and after” interviews. The programme as it stands needs to be raised up to meet the

principles and returning to a bottom up approach would work more favourably for the achievement of the community development horizontal principle. There is a need to recognise the multiple and varied barriers that affect people's lives, and allow for the holistic approach to support their engagement – thus strengthening the equality principle.

Participants were keen to see a target framework developed arising from a clear definition of the desired outcomes (rather than numeric outputs). It was suggested that the next programme should design the desired impacts and results first, including what is meant by social inclusion, rather than being influenced by what 'fits' the IRIS system. Participants would like the programme to clarify what is meant by poverty and social exclusion today (related to the concerns about clarity expressed elsewhere). From there, it was considered appropriate to determine priorities and filter down using local area evidence. It was felt that the next SICAP programme needs to exploit up-to-date appropriate evidence (taking the current context into consideration) in relation to the needs and the most appropriate responses. Once the priorities of the programme have been designed and adapted to local needs, the targets for each area should be set in consultation.

Importance of the theme *Targets Based on Desired Outcomes*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Design the targets arising from a clear definition of what is being sought in terms of outcomes

3.3 Locally Agreed Targets

A key issue raised consistently in relation to the SICAP targets was the way in which the targets were designed and allocated. As alluded to above, participants agreed that they would prefer to see some local consultation and input in relation to the agreement of targets for local areas. This is closely related to the issues raised in relation to a desire to see greater local autonomy and flexibility within the next programme. In the Pobal survey of Pls and LCDCs, 67% of respondents said they would like the opportunity to link in with the programme planning process.

Participants expressed concern that targets within SICAP were set from the "top down" at national level without consultation in relation to local needs and priorities. As a result, many contributors were frustrated that the targets set for their local areas did not reflect the needs of individuals and communities within them, but rather an "arbitrary" division of national targets which in themselves are unclear in terms of how and why such figures had been decided upon. This issue of the lack of clarity on how and why the nature and scale of the targets within the programme had been arrived at was a key issue for participants.

For some, there are key issues such as what are perceived to be somewhat “unrealistic” targets like the metrics for progressing young people into self-employment. It was recognised that many indicators were reflective of the national priorities for the programme but some questioned whether such priorities were correct. Again this came back to the issue of what the programme is trying to achieve and whether the targets were appropriately framing and supporting these aims.

It was strongly expressed that a “bottom-up” locally-led target definition approach would be preferred by participants. It was felt that the “crude” top-down approach did not allow LCDCs and PIs to most effectively address the core needs of their local areas because the targets in many cases were not reflecting the profile of need in the locality. Some areas might require more work within one or more of the programme goals than others; some target groups might be more needful than others in different areas; the range of other programmes and agencies available in local areas differs; there were differences between urban and rural areas; and so on. As a consequence, a common suggestion from many consultees – particularly PIs and community representatives – was that the next iteration of SICAP should include some formal needs analysis for defined geographical areas, in order to provide an evidence base for planning and resource allocation for SICAP.

It was a critical concern that targets should be set in conjunction with the local bodies, i.e. the LCDCs, so that they had “ownership” of the programme in their local areas to go along with the responsibility of implementing it. Locally-set targets would, as suggested by participants, allow more flexibility to respond to key needs in the local areas. The LCDC structures should allow for key local input to identifying the needs and the most appropriate targets to support the effective delivery of SICAP to respond to these. There were some concerns around the capacity of the relatively new LCDC structures to take on this role, however, and it was suggested that guidance and support would be needed to enable and empower LCDCs to play a more active role in the setting and monitoring of locally-identified targets.

In addition, changing the approach to one where there is a collaborative process to identify local needs and set local targets was one that was seen by many participants as needing a change in the nature of the relationships. This would be moving away from the “transactional relationship” towards a “partnership approach” with more recognition of the value of the local actors in the process.

Whilst there is clearly a critical concern in relation to setting targets based on local needs and priorities, it was also recognised that some targets should remain national priorities within the programme, including key minority groups such as members of the Traveller community or new communities, who may not always be given priority within local areas.

Importance of the theme *Locally Agreed Targets*:

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Targets to be set in consultation with LCDCs in order to identify the most appropriate targets for the needs within the local area
- Use a “bottom-up” partnership approach to develop the targets, rather than a prescriptive, “top-down” approach

3.4 Flexibility in Long-Term Goal-Setting

Participants would also like to see flexibility in the programme to facilitate longer-term target-setting. Many consultees consider annual targets to be inappropriate for development with communities and individuals and consider that such targets do not reflect the nature of the work and the outcomes within the programme. Many expressed the wish to see a “lifecycle” approach to interventions and support, with lower numeric targets and an increased focus on capturing the qualitative aspects of the work over a longer timeframe. There is a desire, as mentioned elsewhere, to be able to work more intensively with fewer clients to address those with the highest needs, and for targets which reflect this approach in the next programme.

There is a perception that those in need of activation supports are lower in number, but that these are people who need much more intense and long-term interventions which are unsuited to annualised high numeric targets. Participants suggested that the client perspective is key and there must be an appreciation that beneficiaries are “on a journey” which requires multi-annual programming and funding (in one session, the point was made that LEADER involves five-year funding).

The programme must recognise incremental steps and be flexible enough to accommodate individual needs. Examples of indicators of successful progress (that could be measured) were given:

- ability of that individual to contribute to their local community,
- ability of that individual to volunteer,
- if they have a CV or participate in a job interview,
- ability to participate in decision making structures,
- ability to be part of a group discussion (as opposed to one to one),
- ability to participate in a programme of interventions, for example to turn up weekly training course.

Additionally, some raised concerns about targets for self-employment, given that it is critical to ensure that starting a business is done with careful preparation. Targets were felt to be inappropriate in terms of numbers and timescales, meaning that people may be pushed into self-employment before they are ready, which increases the risk of failure.

Importance of the theme *Flexibility in Long-Term Goal-Setting*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Develop the next programme with some targets set over a longer term to capture progression and development
- The next iteration of SICAP should include some formal needs analysis for defined geographical areas, in order to provide an evidence base for planning and resource allocation for SICAP

3.5 Resources for Reporting on Targets

Participants emphasised that there needs to be adequate resourcing of the programme for the targets set, including appropriate administration support. There is perceived to be an administrative burden associated with the programme, including aspects like duplication of personal action plans – programme participants may have already developed such plans prior to a referral to SICAP. Resources for frontline staff are not considered to be substantial. In one session it was highlighted that there is a cohort of staff due to retire across the PIs, with a consequent concern as to whether these will be replaced, and the impact on already stretched resources. The restrictions in relation to subcontracting were also cited as a challenge in terms of putting pressure on staff.

The participants spoke of the work involved in recording interventions on top of the perceived sheer number of targets and the pressure it places on small organisations. Some indicated that not every intervention is being recorded as it was too time-consuming and burdensome, especially given the paper-based and duplicative nature that many consider the process to entail. Concerns expressed about the administrative burden were also from the perspective that PIs are finding it difficult to attract and retain staff given the high workloads.

It was also suggested that there is a need to work towards professionalising LCDCs: expertise has built up in the local authorities and LCDCs but there is varying capacity in different LCDCs and this needs support and development to ensure all areas can benefit.

The suggested move towards more qualitative targets and reporting mechanisms was considered to be a desirable but challenging shift. There needs to be a recognition, according to participants, that a different and more qualitative reporting framework would require additional time and resources.

Importance of the theme *Resources for Reporting on Targets*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Ensure that the level of administration allowed for in the programme is appropriate to resource the reporting aspects, including qualitative reporting

3.6 Model the System on Solid Data and National/International Best Practice

In considering how to change the measurement and target-setting within SICAP, participants made several suggestions as to where and how other work in Ireland and elsewhere could provide inspiration for developing a framework that captures qualitative outcomes as well as quantitative outputs. There was a sense that while SICAP has achieved a lot, the programme could be enhanced and strengthened by examining best-practice solutions developed elsewhere.

One key starting point suggested by several participants was the use of national and international data to identify the key programme priorities and responses, based on the identification of trends, emerging needs, and key issues. The most recent census could, it was suggested, provide detailed local information in relation to identifying the targets and key concerns for SICAP in local areas. It was commented that the substantial data gathered through IRIS and other means would also be useful in this process. Participants suggested that data gathered by other programmes and agencies in relation to social inclusion issues would be helpful in designing priorities and appropriate measurements of success for the next programme. This is particularly important as it was felt by some that the data collected within SICAP is in “silos” and disconnected from other information. Additionally, some commented that there were inconsistencies and other issues with IRIS data so it should not be the sole source of data.

Learning from previous local development programmes, the work of other agencies and programmes nationally, and international examples were all put forward as possible bases for the development of alternative measurement frameworks. Participants suggested that there had been work done in previous local development programmes in relation to capturing qualitative activity. Some other national programmes appear to have mechanisms for reporting on outcomes in a more qualitative fashion, and to have ways to measure progression. International models in relation to, for example, overseas development work, were cited in a number of sessions as having frameworks that SICAP could use.

Importance of the theme *Model the System on Solid Data and National/International Best Practice*:

- **Somehow important:** raised across different consultations but with less emphasis than some other issues

Suggested solutions:

- Take existing models for the capture and recording of qualitative outcomes in development programmes to form a basis for the development of one for SICAP

4 Beneficiaries & Target Groups

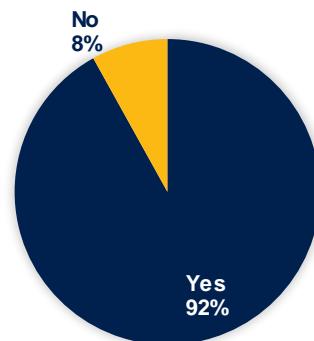
4.1 Flexibility in Defining Target Groups

The target groups were the subject of significant discussion at each consultation session. The discussions particularly focused on those who have been excluded and there was wide agreement that other groups should be included. Some of the groups suggested include:

- over 65s
- members of the LGBT community
- disadvantaged women
- children under 15
- young women from the Traveller Community
- young people with mental health difficulties
- dependent adults on social welfare
- carers
- individuals who are homeless
- smallholders and marginalised rural men
- ex-offenders
- people with substance misuse problems

Whilst many people within the above groups do engage with SICAP as they fall into the current target groups for other reasons, many felt that the groups above have particular needs that SICAP should explicitly address in addition to the existing target group criteria. The chart on the right shows the response from PIs and LCDCs to the relevant Pobal survey question, with 57 of 62 respondents (92%) stating that the target groups should be expanded.

Should Target Groups Be Expanded?



It was felt that the local community, through the LCDC (or other mechanism), should have some involvement in the identification of key target groups for the area. Whilst there was general agreement that SICAP was a positive programme for those it was currently working with, participants were keen that the programme did not exclude anyone whom it really should be assisting.

It was suggested that local flexibility could be given through the use of an “emerging needs” category. This group would comprise a small percentage of the overall

number and would allow LCDCs and PIs to quickly react to any events locally. More flexibility sought in relation to the prioritisation of target groups at local level would give greater capacity to react to particular local issues such as the arrival of refugees or the closure of a significant employer.

Engaging with children and young people at risk of early school leaving was seen as important: there is a feeling that the programme should ensure a “first chance” rather than relying on “second chances”. To reduce the risk of early school leaving, the supports need to start in early childhood, rather than in secondary school. It was also suggested that some small incentives may be required to encourage beneficiaries to remain engaged with the programme. This should form part of the whole family approach and be undertaken in partnership with other organisations such as schools.

It was suggested by some that the programme should not identify “target groups” but rather assess individuals on the basis of need on a case-by-case basis. However, most participants acknowledge the need to identify target groups, but they would like more involvement in how these are identified and prioritised, in particular at local level. It was suggested that local flexibility should apply to at least some of the target groups within the programme. It was, however, acknowledged that certain target groups may need to be mandated nationally to ensure that particular groups’ needs are addressed, an example being members of the Traveller community.

On the other hand, there was agreement that the target groups agreed at the outset of the programme should remain for its lifetime. Any changes to those included can have a significant impact as work programmes then have to adjusted, and the trust of beneficiaries can also be impacted.

It was suggested that there may be a benefit to weighting the target groups to balance the needs of different target groups. There would be some target groups who require fewer interventions than others and this could be balanced through weighting. Participants were of the view that this type of approach would incentivise continued engagement with certain target groups.

While participants were keen for the target groups to be extended, they were also concerned that the continued use of the Pobal Deprivation Index could impact on beneficiaries’ ability to access SICAP. It was highlighted that the index does not necessarily match current housing policy and in rural areas, there can be issues regarding isolation and access to transport.

The differences between urban and rural communities also needs to be considered in the development of the target groups. In rural communities, beneficiaries may live over a wide geographical area, they may be living in isolated areas and reaching out to them may be more difficult. LCDCs will have an insight into their community and may be able to provide valuable direction when target groups are being agreed.

Importance of the theme *Flexibility in Defining Target Groups*:

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations and most of the additional groups suggested came up repeatedly

Suggested solutions:

- In the development of the next iteration of SICAP the target groups should be reviewed to ensure that those the programme is designed to assist are included
- The provision of some local flexibility regarding target groups should also be assessed

4.2 Focus on Social Inclusion and Community Development

Participants perceive that the principles of community development have been lost in SICAP, and they would like to return to these principles. Community development requires a flexible approach especially for staff as much of it happens outside office hours. Many would like the programme to focus more on quality rather than quantity. There was a perception that SICAP was too focused on activation, and that community development has suffered as a result. There was a strong feeling that rather than activation, the focus should be on community participation and community work. Community development can be used to change culture, particularly where intergenerational disadvantage exists – these groups can be difficult to engage with. Where these issues exist, a holistic approach is required.

Many participants would like to see a focus on social inclusion as the outcome and to be able to support community groups with small grants as well as providing training. It was pointed out that SICAP is small in comparison to other dedicated programmes and needs to be realistic in what can be achieved given the level of resources. It was felt that SICAP is good at outreach work and that it achieves the best results when it aims to do something which is small, focused and effective.

The targets are seen as restricting longer term work. There is a view that SICAP is “a work in progress” and that there has been a positive impact from the work completed to date. The work, however, needs to be productive and impactful rather than being simply about hitting targets. There is a tension as regards balancing caseload and working with the most marginalised. There is a perception that the targets in use make working with the most marginalised less attractive as it can be difficult to work with these beneficiaries given the strict focus on targets. The use of two interventions as the measurement for the targets may not accurately reflect the needs of the beneficiary who may need to learn basic skills before they can enter education or work.

According to participants, flexible and innovative actions are required, involving long-term outreach, to achieve outputs and outcomes in the long term: there are few short-

term fixes. It was felt that additional time and resources are needed as this is not something that can be achieved in a short time period. For many, IRIS does not give the full picture of the level of engagement with these groups: for example, many Travellers do not identify their ethnicity and many women who experience abuse do not state the real reason for attendance.

There was a feeling among participants that SICAP should not be targeting these groups from a particular stance, such as activation, if other service providers are working with them on this area of their lives. It was suggested that some marginalised communities do not appear to have strong community leaders or strong local advocacy groups, and the danger is that while the programme works with people within those communities, there is not an effective method of community involvement. The programme needs to facilitate longer timeframes for working with more disadvantaged people and developing the capacity of the community to participate. It may take a year to intensively support someone enough before SICAP workers can even start working with them on progression into education or employment. Similarly, a high level of pre-development work is required in developing the capacity of marginalised communities to organise themselves.

The participants acknowledged that the SICAP Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were a good thing but there may be a need to switch the focus from individuals to interventions. Other suggestions included weighting the interventions, as some beneficiaries can be helped in three minutes while others could require a couple of hours.

There was a view that the Deprivation Index is an inadequate way of determining the communities which need assistance. Given the current lack of social housing and the provision of the Housing Assistance Payment, those who might otherwise be SICAP beneficiaries are living in communities that are not classified as disadvantaged.⁴

Reporting and the level of paperwork is seen as a barrier to “getting out and working with” beneficiaries. There are concerns that not all activity is recorded due to the specific nature of the targets.

Importance of the theme *Focus on Social Inclusion and Community Development:*

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

⁴ Pobal provided the following clarification. The Pobal Deprivation Index is driven by three key concepts; demographic profile, social class composition and labour market situation, each of which is measured through a set of observable indicators taken from the census. It does not include indicators which measure social housing or the Housing Assistance Payment.

Suggested solutions:

- The next iteration of SICAP needs to ensure that there is a balance between working with individuals and communities
- There is also a need to ensure that the Deprivation Index is not a barrier to working with those who need assistance

4.3 Barriers to Engagement with SICAP

The SICAP registration form was identified by participants as a possible barrier to engagement by clients with the programme. The level of information requested can create the view that the programme is bureaucratic. Participants stated that the current process creates a trust issue, as so much personal information is requested up-front. It was suggested that the registration process could be designed to compile the information more gradually, as trust is built up.⁵

There is a need to explain the programme to beneficiaries who are just interested in receiving help – they do not recognise where the funding comes from for the services they receive. There is a need to promote what the programme does as SICAP may not be understood by beneficiaries, particularly those with literacy issues.

There was a perception that the language around SICAP was leading to exclusion as there is a significant number of acronyms. There were also comments that the language created the impression that the programme was about box ticking. In addition, beneficiaries do not like to classify themselves as disadvantaged.

Other concerns raised included how to identify with some groups such as NEETs as they do not show up on registers. Agencies and programmes such as the Juvenile Liaison Service, the Department of Social Protection and YouthReach were suggested by participants as good sources of referrals. Other participants highlighted the value of working with schools to identify and work with individuals, so that they are then “on the radar” of the PI when they leave school. This ties into the scope of the target groups, as to be able to work better with school-age clients they need to be included in the programme.

While participants in the consultation sessions would like to see an increase in the target groups, they do not want the forms to become too elaborate in terms of categories. Similarly, consultees indicated that beneficiaries self-identifying and declaring themselves in categories is seen as intrusive and counter-productive. There is local knowledge among case officers as to what categories people fit into, and case officers should be able to categorise beneficiaries based on this.

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Pobal provided the following clarification. In the SICAP '[Training Guide to Completing the Individual Registration Form](#)' it is stated that PIs can provisionally select a no response option for some registration questions if someone is reluctant to answer all questions initially, and over a number of meetings to gather the missing information.

There was a feeling that a mechanism needs to be put in place to assist those who are difficult to record on IRIS. This is a particular problem for those who are homeless as they do not have an address and so cannot be recorded. Where these issues occur beneficiaries are not counted and thus there is no incentive to work with certain groups given the focus on targets.

Importance of the theme *Barriers to Engagement with SICAP*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- In the next iteration of SICAP, the use of plain English should be central to the programme and acronyms should be kept to a minimum
- The registration form should be reviewed to ensure that beneficiaries are only asked to provide information that is necessary

4.4 More Resources, Support and Collaboration

It was suggested that the structures need to be flattened and that additional resources are required. There was a feeling that dropout levels by clients are high as PIs do not have the time or capacity to provide the supports required. There is also a feeling that there were areas that SICAP should not be working in because other organisations are already undertaking these activities.

There is a perceived lack of communication in situations where SICAP could play an important role. SICAP not being mentioned as a resource and support for those seeking employment at times when job losses are announced in local areas was given as an example of this.

Participants were of the view that the lack of coordination with national bodies is very problematic. An example was given of 200 Syrian refugees who were due to arrive in a community. Whilst the matter has been discussed at national level, there had been little or no engagement with the local community, which led to a siloed or segmented approach to education and health planning, whereas it should be integrated with SICAP work and community provision.

Many participants were keen to have opportunities to share best practice and knowledge across the country. There was also a feeling that there was a need for a strong national campaign to link what is happening locally and nationally, but community development is key.

Importance of the theme *More Resources, Support and Collaboration*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Thought should be given to how collaboration can be encouraged

5 Innovation

5.1 Reduce Top-Down Structures and Allow Local Flexibility to Innovate

There was a strong feeling from consultees that the current top-down structure of SICAP is too prescriptive and actively discourages innovation. In particular, the focus on strict numerical targets which carry penalties for falling short was seen as a huge disincentive to innovate. It was felt that a balance needs to be struck between flexibility and process, with more leeway at a local level to identify problems and develop tailored solutions. A more local design with reduced top-down structures would ensure that the focus could remain on beneficiaries, and innovative solutions could be formulated to address individual problems – in other words, there is a need to build out rigidity and build in the flexibility that facilitates innovation.

The fact that targets are decided in advance at a national level was seen as a big problem, and it was suggested that there is a mismatch between national expectations and local needs. It was felt that, again, there needs to be local input on targets based on local knowledge and research, and that this should be an ongoing process rather than targets simply being put in place at the beginning. It was very firmly put forward that the focus needs to be taken from the national programme in favour of a local, person-focused approach, where programmes are built from the ground up based on individual cases and individual, local needs. This was met with widespread agreement.

It was felt that SICAP is currently “quite restrictive” in terms of how PIs can engage with target groups. For example, it was noted that there is a requirement to have two meetings with a group before they can be counted, regardless of the specifics of the group and the particular challenges being addressed. What are perceived to be “one-size-fits-all procedures” make it hard to tailor or localise – there should be scope for PIs to tailor their own approach to target groups. This would allow local groups to react in an agile way to particular localised hotspots.

Some PIs expressed dislike of the term “implementer” and would prefer to be seen as partners – this ties in to the sense that they do not have the flexibility to innovate because they are tasked with a very specific implementation of top-down targets. It was proposed that fundamentally there should be a bottom-up structure with the ultimate emphasis on local community development, and that there should be parallel ownership of the programme at community level.

It was suggested that there should be more allowance for preparatory work and engagement with communities, rather than having to fit these communities into ready-made, top-down targets-based structures. There was general agreement that there should be scope to re-engage frequently with people participating in local programmes – to get their input on how the programmes need to innovate so as to get the best outcomes for them. This was presented in terms of “building capacity for communities” and enhancing “community development practices”. It was suggested

that such an approach could involve, for example, focusing on one community project with a community group for a year rather than trying to do multiple different things with community groups.

Again regarding the numerical targets, it was felt that the constant pressure to record quantitative results hinders the ability to innovate. It should be possible to record more qualitative results, such as the level of intervention necessary, and each individual engagement should be recorded rather than working purely on the basis of a two-engagement minimum.⁶ At the moment there is a bias against clients who, for example, could be helped with a single three-hour engagement, as these do not map to the target system. It was felt that it can become a pursuit of purely cosmetic numbers and this limits what work can actually be done. It should be possible to do different things with different target groups, and tailor the response to what is needed and what will work in specific cases. It was pointed out that it can be extremely hard to quantify outcomes in areas such as domestic violence, given the “cross-cutting” issues involved and the complexities of each individual’s experience.

In terms of what outcomes can be pursued, it was broadly agreed that the focus on Goal 3 is much too strong, to the detriment of the other goals. The scope of the programme needs to go beyond just activation and job creation. An increased focus on Goal 1 in particular was proposed, and it was suggested that the programme could innovate by taking a more holistic aim of social inclusion with a greater focus on currently excluded groups – an example was given of how PIs continue to work with older people to prevent isolation. It was felt that this more person-centred approach was key and that the needs of the individual needed to be centred rather than the needs of the programme. This kind of bottom-up structure would be key to facilitating the creation of innovative local programmes.

Rather than innovating on the existing SICAP systems, there was general agreement that there should be a brand new model implemented. There was concern that if it was just a case of amending the targets system and the current qualitative/quantitative balance of that, this might not bring real innovative change. It was felt that it would be better to implement a pyramid of engagement – a hierarchy of need and response – and let people state what work they will do and give them the space to pursue it, rather than judge everything by targets. It was suggested that any new system should be honest and acknowledge different levels of engagement needed, case by case, rather than reducing it to numbers; there should be a tiered level of intervention based on need.

It was suggested that SICAP is failing on the social economy element, and is particularly falling behind in this area in relation to the rest of the EU. Any innovations put forward should aim to address this.

⁶ Pobal provided the following clarification. The IRIS system is designed so that each intervention with local community groups and individual clients can be recorded.

Importance of the theme *Reduce Top-Down Structures and Allow Local Flexibility to Innovate*:

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Reduce emphasis on numerical targets and give local groups flexibility to develop their own optimum target groups and outcomes
- Allow more qualitative interventions and reporting

5.2 Allow Collaboration and Sharing of Ideas

It was proposed that staff networking needs to be brought back at local and national level – it used to be much more common and was a great source of innovation as people could share ideas. Apart from ideas for bigger initiatives, it was helpful simply to reduce staff isolation and for seeing how other groups innovate in their day to day operations – there was a “recognition that innovation can be small, simple … run of the mill”. It was pointed out that Pobal organised networking events in previous programmes but that the perception is that this is not currently happening: this is something that could be re-started.⁷

It was pointed out that local groups have been very innovative in the past and that perhaps this has been somewhat forgotten about. It was felt that there is a need for recognition that Local Development Companies are bigger than SICAP, and there should be allowance for recording local work under SICAP. Innovative ways of working in partnership could be fostered, again with Pls/Local Development Companies as the main link. It was suggested that there should be a focus on disseminating local innovation, on networking and sharing learning across the whole programme and that there is a need to take account of existing local work.

There could be greater outreach and collaboration with local community groups and local skills, experience and expertise could be utilised in the coordination of the local programme. Beneficiary groups would thus become like equal partners in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of local programmes. Part of the thinking behind this was that there was a feeling that a community has to be ready and willing for innovation, and in this sense it would be key to have local buy-in, strong leaders and champions at local level.

It was felt that there could be closer inter-programme development, particularly with other initiatives such as LEADER that have a social inclusion remit. It was suggested

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Pobal provided a subsequent clarification on this point. Networking events have been occurring under SICAP 2015-2017. For example, in 2016 four regional support sessions were organised by Pobal to support LCDCs and two national support events were organised to present good practice on engagement strategies and raise awareness on particular issues.

that there should be a forum for more cross-PI collaboration to allow PIs to leverage each other's strengths and reduce levels of duplication, and that networking between PIs and LCDCs should be encouraged and supported to enable sharing of good practice and innovation. It was also suggested that material collected via IRIS may be shared among LCDCs so that they could learn from one another.⁸

It was proposed that SICAP could help to develop inclusive collaboration structures such as peer networks, regional stakeholder events (which ideally would be funded by SICAP), a national knowledge-sharing system and a national conference. It was felt that if these structures were put in place and kept running as a routine part of the programme, it would naturally lead to more innovative practice at all levels.

In the survey of national and local stakeholder organisations, 39% of 184 respondents said that their organisation has collaborated in the past on SICAP projects or activities. Of these, the most common activity (61%) was active work on local initiatives and projects, with 34% attending local or regional networks together. Of those who said they did not collaborate on SICAP activities, 54% said this was because they did not work directly with local development companies on SICAP activities, 15% said it was because they worked at national rather than local level, and 31% said that the people they work with are not a SICAP target group.

There was a consensus that in the past, the “best” projects were those developed and executed in partnership. In contrast, it was felt that the targets, tendering, reporting structures, and other aspects of SICAP as currently constituted are not designed with collaboration in mind and often act to directly discourage it. It was suggested that the tender process in particular has hurt this kind of inter-group sharing and thus hampered innovation, as tendering means PIs are now in competition rather than collaboration with each other.

Similarly, a concern was raised that if, for example, it was decided that innovation should be a core feature of SICAP in future, with reward structures built to encourage it, how would such funding for innovation work? Would it end up exacerbating competition if there was a fall in the base budget with an innovation “reward” on top for those who qualify? It was pointed out that this kind of system would be counter to true innovation, which should be allowed to come in horizontally and be shared between groups.

It was suggested that in the past there was a more horizontal relationship with statutory agencies, and local groups could advocate with them, but now there is a power imbalance in favour of the statutory agencies. It was felt that SICAP generally is characterised too much by a top-down approach: this means little opportunity to share or learn from each other.

⁸ Pobal provided the following clarification. Two reports are prepared annually on SICAP and both are publicly available on the Pobal SICAP webpage – an end of year report and mid-term report. These draw extensively upon IRIS data and qualitative information provided through narrative reports and case studies, and present the overall progress of the programme and national level programme data.

SICAP is seen as a standalone programme, which supports a great deal of local groups but it was felt that there needs to be a recognition of its role as a developer – with a need for more facilitation of collaboration between groups. It was agreed that SICAP should fulfil a role as a catalyst and enabler of these groups, rather than necessarily as an implementer of top-down processes. It was suggested that SICAP used to be more of a complementary funder with a focus on providing a supportive framework; there has since been a loss of this inter-agency, partnership focus in favour of a targets-based model, which discourages inter-agency solutions. It was agreed that quantitative targets should be less important than a qualitative outcome-based focus.

It was suggested that SICAP could fulfil more of a leveraging role in terms of developing links and partnerships outside of the programme itself, and thus forming broader networks that would facilitate idea-sharing and innovation at a local and national level. Similarly, it was felt that it would be enormously helpful if SICAP could leverage funding for local pilot programmes and thus eliminate some of the risk that small groups face when they try to develop innovative strategies.

The issue of public participation networks (PPNs) was raised, with some contributors expressing the perception that they “are working against us” – there was some disagreement on this point, however, and it seemed that the performance and usefulness of PPNs varies by county. In general, participants would like to see more engagement with the public participation network.

Importance of the theme *Allow Collaboration and Sharing of Ideas*:

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Facilitate staff networking and inter-organisational networking at a local and national level to collaborate and share ideas
- Reduce competition between local implementers rather than increasing it by means of tender-based commissioning, which is seen as hindering innovation by discouraging information-sharing

5.3 Make Innovation an Eligible Activity with Rewards and Funding

A key point that came up during the discussions on innovation was that if innovation is to be encouraged in SICAP, it needs to be built in as an eligible activity with appropriate rewards and funding attached. It was felt that as it stands, there is no incentive to take risks and try new things, as the programme is too prescriptive and restrictive and can even carry penalties if innovation does not work out straight away. For innovation to be encouraged, it would need to be a core theme in the

programme, and that allowance for emerging areas and needs should be built into the programme from the design stage.

It was felt that there is zero flexibility at the moment – it has been “pared back” and “SICAP is regressive in terms of innovation”, and that even programmes that have done well in the past have withered once brought back in under the targets structure. There was a consensus that with the reporting requirements and systems at present, there is little room for innovation. It was suggested that more flexibility should be introduced in terms of targets and procedures and that if this was taken on board, SICAP should consider ring-fencing a certain negotiable percentage of budget to be used flexibly for innovative decision-making at local level. It was generally agreed that there should be encouragement of testing, case studies, and pilot schemes rather than a narrow focus on targets; the feeling was that “democratic experimentation” has proven to be the best approach whereas SICAP is “too prescriptive”.

Participants pointed out that there is a barrier to innovation where an organisation is pressured with a high caseload target; targets in general punish innovation and discourage risk. The observation was made that failure within an organisation like a PI is not the same as failure in a commercial business – rather, it is an opportunity to learn and adapt procedures. It was felt that with that in mind, there needs to be flexibility and allowance for the possibility of failure. SICAP is perceived to be very prescriptive and this would need to be loosened to allow for greater possibility of innovation, as the narrow focus on nationally-set targets forces local groups into adopting sub-optimal procedures and prevents adaptation.

Similarly, it was pointed out that rural areas naturally have fewer clients, which when the targets perspective is applied can make them seem like they are doing worse than urban counterparts. Again, the feeling was that there needs to be flexibility to set local targets, and there needs to be ring-fenced funding as encouragement to innovate.

It was pointed out that there is no funding for innovation at present and no grants available for client groups to fund their own innovative ideas, even though the amounts required in individual cases might be very small. Some participants said that they reach outside SICAP for funding in such cases. An example was given of a young volunteer running a free fitness club – the case worker wanted to give him a couple of hundred euro so he could get formal training, but there was no scope within SICAP to get this so they sourced it elsewhere. There was general consensus that backing groups even in small ways like this can have a huge impact as it empowers them and keeps them going.

In order to properly resource innovation, it was suggested that multi-annual budgets should be brought back, there should be recognition of voluntary contributions which are integral to many programmes, and that organisations should not be punished for not spending their full budget. Following on from this, it was stressed that SICAP needs to allow time and space to acknowledge innovative work from concept phase

through to development and on to implementation. It was pointed out that the essence of community development is working with communities to design solutions to their problems and that this type of work takes a lot of time. In terms of annual plans, it was suggested that time-frames should not be narrowly enforced, and that there needs to be allowance given for risk-taking and failure, while providing a safety net for such failures.

It was felt that SICAP represented a change of structure in relation to engagement with communities, but this was not matched with an investment within PIs to upskill people to work with individuals and community groups. In this light, it was suggested that frontline PI staff are already innovative in terms of holding true to community development within the confines of the current programme structures.

There was general agreement that local groups are already innovating in many areas, but that this is not being communicated adequately and is being overlooked at a national level. Participants perceived that there were many case studies and pilot schemes being carried out at local levels and there needs to be a commitment at a national level to take this evidence base on board and take account of innovations already being made. An example was given of evidence-based best-practice early childhood models, where flexibility has been built in from the start to encourage innovation.

Finally, the prospect of a new round of tenders was raised, and it was stated that whatever mechanism is used, there needs to be time given for LCDGs to give local inputs before the design of the programme is imposed on them. It was felt that the fundamental requirement was to “listen to communities and what they need”.

Importance of the theme *Make Innovation an Eligible Activity with Rewards and Funding:*

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Incorporate ideas around innovation into the core design stage of SICAP
- Give funding for pilot schemes and other innovations and reduce penalties for not meeting targets

5.4 Improve Programme and Reintroduce Proven Methods

There was general agreement that allowing flexibility and scope for innovation was desirable and there are many current problems for which innovative solutions need to be formulated; however, it was also acknowledged that innovation for its own sake should be avoided. It was agreed that some problematic aspects of SICAP as it stands could be improved rather than being replaced, and similarly that proven methods from earlier programmes could be reintroduced to great effect.

There was some discussion around innovation in relation to reporting. The idea of going paperless and relying solely on IRIS or a similar system was put forward to general approval, as it would greatly reduce the amount of paperwork necessary. More generally, it was suggested that it is important to trust Programme Implementers and not micro-manage; this could lessen the amount of duplicated work that exists under the current system. There was a certain amount of frustration among participant groups at a perceived lack of trust from the top with a requirement to report every minor detail and constantly justify themselves. The feeling was that local groups should be trusted to stay on top of their paperwork and that in this respect there could be improvements to IRIS to make it more efficient. It was felt that all functions of the CRM should be used (more like Eyeball) and for the full range of facilities it was designed for, i.e. both qualitative and quantitative information capture.

There was a sense that SICAP could go back to what worked well in previous programmes and that there was no need to keep completely reinventing – that there could be innovation around doing the old things in a new way. The idea of reintroducing secondary benefits was put forward as an example. It was suggested that for community development there was a need to look back to previous community development programmes.

Similarly, it was suggested that rather than innovate in the sense of finding brand new areas to focus on, any innovations should aim to tackle gaps in existing programmes, for instance in areas like youth unemployment and early school-leaving. An example was raised of the current registration process which is seen as a stumbling block as it is seen as too complicated and involved, especially for people who only need a small amount of support – it was generally agreed that it could be simplified, and that this would help in delivering more cohesive support within communities.

In terms of linking job creation to target groups, it was suggested that new businesses should be drawn in early by local programmes and their particular needs should be addressed from the start – that local programmes should be coordinated on this basis rather than generalising. It was suggested that a dedicated social enterprise role could be introduced in each area, and that innovation could include the reintroduction of lobbying and representation. Finally, the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance scheme was praised, and it was stated that it should be used across the country in a uniform way across all SICAP programmes, and supported by the Department of Social Protection.

It was suggested that SICAP should also support county-level innovation – there is a need to look for what is currently there and support that, rather than necessarily seeking to bring in its own innovations. Examples given included Family Resource Centres and refugee programmes.

There was a sense in some quarters that innovation is already happening “despite SICAP”. For example, it was mentioned that in the past, core community programmes, which were more autonomous and thus better able to innovate, could

always leverage funding but that this is absent in SICAP as it exists now. Additionally, it was pointed out that there is no facility for named recognition of LCDC innovation, and no ability to record co-work and match funding between organisations, as there used to be in the past. It was felt that if innovation is core to the programme, then the allocated budget should reflect this and SICAP should also in future serve to help leverage funding from outside the programme.

It was suggested that there is scope for innovation in terms of programme branding – at the moment, most people do not know what SICAP is, and the name being changed every three years only exacerbates this. It was noted that there was a catch here in that the current name is not necessarily ideal, with some participants for example disliking that it emphasises to people that they are marginalised and excluded, which is disempowering. There was some agreement that the programme should develop a solid new brand to address current issues which should not change in the foreseeable future.

Importance of the theme *Improve Programme and Reintroduce Proven Methods:*

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

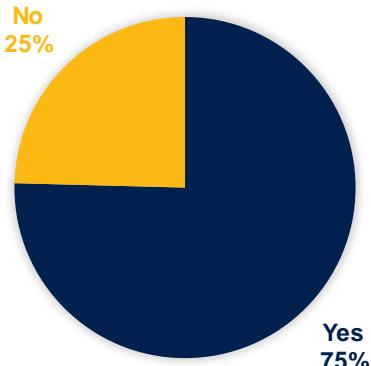
- Look at what has worked in previous iterations of the programme and how this could address current shortcomings
- Look at what has worked locally and incorporate this into the national programme

6 Funding & Finance

6.1 Financial Resources for Administrative and Infrastructure Costs

Many participants felt that administration and management of the programme should be specifically provided for in terms of financial resources: not just frontline but core organisational costs for Pls. There is a perception that the arrangements are too restrictive at present: that while there has been a decrease in funding, the percentage of administration spend required has not changed despite the level of administration input not reducing. It was suggested by some that the administration figure of 25% needs to be split and expanded to allow management and corporate governance costs to be funded from SICAP separately from the ongoing administration funding. As can be seen from the chart to the right, 75% of 61 respondents to the PI and LCDC survey indicated a desire to see the finance rules refined.

Refine Finance Rules?



Similarly, some suggested that funding only frontline services does not adequately provide for organisations to meet their necessary central costs, and it was suggested that SICAP should also fund infrastructure for organisations to address the costs to the Pls in taking on the programme and operating it.⁹ Some commented that in effect, other programmes (e.g. HSE funding) are subventing SICAP projects as the administration budget within SICAP does not provide funding to keep offices running. According to participants, a lot of other programmes have been propping up SICAP: “robbing Peter to pay Paul”. Participants suggested that there is a need for SICAP to invest in overheads if projects are to be run properly and professionally.

There was a lot of agreement among participants that the administration budget might cover the day-to-day administration costs of the programme but failed to adequately cover the corporate overheads, i.e. management and governance at organisational level. It was commented that administration was not the same thing as management and governance – the latter are expected to “happen by magic” with no specific allocation of funding for this aspect of programme implementation.¹⁰

⁹ Pobal provided the following clarification. SICAP funding covers both direct ‘action’ costs (for staff and non-staff costs) and indirect administration costs, and not only for frontline services as suggested. The administration budget (which is set at a maximum of 25% of the annual Lot budget) covers costs associated with general administration, management, office overhead costs, staff training and development etc. In 2016, 30% of costs reported as administration costs went towards office running costs.

¹⁰ Pobal provided the following clarification on this point. Corporate overheads are eligible costs under SICAP, and include expenditure such as salary costs for the management and administration of the

Participants noted that there was inconsistency and confusion in relation to what could be charged under the administration heading. For example, outreach offices and management are counted as administrative and not direct costs. Different organisations appear to account for their costs in different ways.

In general, it was felt that the programme's administration was resource-intensive, and that an element of funding should be put to one side to cover corporate overheads in the form of a "management fee" rather than simply the ongoing administration costs. Concern was expressed that without this, PIs will be reluctant to tender for the programme as it is perceived as costly to administer.

Importance of the theme *Financial Resources for Administrative and Infrastructure Costs*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Provide clarity around the administration heading
- Recognise and fund the corporate overheads, management, and governance costs to the PIs in implementing the programme

6.2 Funding Staff: Salaries and Support

Concerns were expressed in relation to the capacity of the SICAP budget to adequately fund the required staff resources. Participants noted that budget reductions had led to staff cuts, impacting on the capacity of PIs to deliver on the programme targets and/or to provide quality work. Some noted that salary grades had been "inherited" from previous programmes but with a reduced budget for SICAP this was challenging in terms of being able to maintain appropriate staffing levels.

The perception that salary levels are subject to caps or limitations meant that some participants reported difficulties in attracting and retaining staff within the programme.¹¹ It was suggested that PIs were not in a position to reward staff appropriately for hard work or high quality. In particular, the improving economic situation means that some fear that there will be increased opportunity and competition for staff, with SICAP unable to provide an attractive enough offering to secure and retain the best quality staff in the long term.

programme e.g. CEO and Company Manager. 65% of administration costs reported in 2016 related to the salary costs of management and other administrative staff.

¹¹ Pobal provided the following clarification in relation to this matter. The programme does not set any caps or scales for staff funding and staff pay scales are at the discretion of each Programme Implementer.

It was understood that PIs are independent organisations and this presents a challenge in setting national salary scales or grades, but it was also felt in some cases that there was a difficulty in having the same job roles performing the same work on the same national programme, but with different remuneration. According to participants when the programme does place limits on salaries and staffing, it was felt by some that this was somewhat unfair when not matched by mandated salary scales.¹²

Another key concern was that recognition and funding should be provided within the programme for support and training for staff and in some cases it was felt that frontline staff were being lost because of the absence of funded training.¹³

Participants would welcome the opportunity to have greater access to training and support, both in terms of PI staff and LCDC members. Additionally, the issue of supporting PI staff involved in difficult situations, e.g. counselling for staff dealing with aggressive clients or in cases such as the suicide of a client, was raised and participants in the consultation sessions would like to see provision within the new programme for such critical support.

Importance of the theme *Funding Staff: Salaries and Support:*

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Consider the level of funding in relation to staff costs
- Introduce funding for training and support

6.3 Flexibility and Evidence-Based Local Tailoring for Budgets

Participants believe that more flexibility is needed between the three goals – some rebalance is needed to take account of local needs, from the perspective of the budget as well as other elements of the programme.

Participants suggested that the local context needed to be taken into account in the planning and resource allocation, with some commenting that there needed to be justification of percentages allocated to local areas. As with other elements of SICAP, the “top-down” decision-making in respect of the budgetary allocations was problematic for many consultation participants, and it was felt that funding decisions are too restrictive – it was suggested that there needs to be a different arrangement based on local needs assessments and a clear evidence base.

¹² Pobal provided the following clarification in relation to this matter. The programme does not set any caps or scales for staff funding and staff pay scales are at the discretion of each Programme Implementer.

¹³ Pobal provided the following clarification in relation to staff training costs. Training and development for personnel delivering SICAP are eligible expenditures and treated under the administration cost category.

Benchmarking against other programmes was suggested in respect of budget allocation. Participants also suggested that procurement rules should be looked at to be made more appropriate and less rigid for SICAP.

Contributors considered that there should be a shift away from employment activation to social inclusion from a budget perspective, in a flexible way. However, this is not required everywhere as some rural communities continue to struggle with high unemployment levels.

Some participants commented on the restrictive nature of the budgetary split across the three goals which they consider to be inflexible and does not necessarily reflect the costs of providing the activities. There was a strong sense that greater flexibility is needed across the goals, with some commenting that staff were “tied in knots” attempting to ensure their time apportionment across all goals reflect the specified percentages and that there was difficulty and confusion amongst staff in relation to apportioning to more than one goal.

It was felt that the goal percentage splits did not reflect local priorities. Participants also felt, as outlined in the previous section, that there is a need for an acknowledgement of funding leveraged into the programme similar to previous local development programmes.

The inflexibility relating to the outsourcing percentage was also problematic for some who would like to see more capacity to flex this allocation to deliver an effective programme.

Another aspect of flexibility is the desire to see a longer-term funding stream rather than annual budgets, which make it difficult to plan, has an impact on staff, and is not suited to effective long-term work with clients and communities.

Importance of the theme *Flexibility and Evidence-Based Local Tailoring for Budgets:*

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Allow flexibility between goals and in relation to other funding allocations
- New programme to have local input to budget-setting for local areas

6.4 Improve Focus and Increase Funding

From a funding perspective, participants had a similar concern to that expressed elsewhere in relation to the need for a clearly defined and focused programme which is moving away from activation on a large scale towards social inclusion and more intense inputs to those with the most challenges.

Overall, participants felt the SICAP budget was small and thinly spread by comparison with previous programmes and with other national programme budgets, which limits its capacity to have impact. The small budgets are mostly focused on frontline services, according to participants, but are very thinly spread across many areas and needs. Some attendees felt that SICAP needs to become specific and niche, with national agreement on what people should be doing within the programme.

Related to this issue is the opinion that parts of SICAP provision replicate other work, e.g. activation into employment replicates the work of local employment bodies such as the Local Employment Service. Some participants in the consultation sessions felt that it would be better to have SICAP focused on activities that are not funded from other statutory sources.

There is a concern that the decreasing budgets mean that expansion and innovation within the programme are not feasible until and unless there is an increase in the overall allocations. This has had effects such as the closure of outreach offices which is making it more challenging to meet the needs of people in some areas. This was attributed to a perceived lack of recognition of the different costs associated with delivering programmes in rural areas.

According to many participants, “the bottom line is there is a need for more funding”, particularly in rural programmes and with NEETs. The decrease from one programme to the next gives rise to a concern that it is not possible to keep up the level of service for disadvantaged people in these circumstances.

The issue of the capacity to leverage SICAP funding was of concern to many in addition, with calls to consider leveraging additional funds as a key aspect of a new programme.¹⁴ This is related to the concerns expressed in relation to more co-ordinated and joined-up thinking in relation to the implementation and delivery of programmes at national and local levels.

Importance of the theme *Improve Focus and Increase Funding:*

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Define clearly what the SICAP programme is intended to achieve
- Ensure it does not overlap with other agencies and funding so that there is no duplication and potential waste of scarce funds

¹⁴

Pobal provided the following clarification. The programme does not prevent SICAP funds from being used to leverage additional funding and PIs can assist local community groups to leverage funding through SICAP. For example, in 2016 262 local community groups were assisted to leverage additional funding and secured a total of €1.35m.

6.5 Remedies / Penalties

A key concern from a financial perspective (although also related to targets) was the application of “remedies”, i.e. financial penalties for failure to achieve targets within the programme. It was expressed by large numbers of participants that this aspect of the programme was extremely unwelcome and counterproductive. It was felt that there was an unfair aspect in setting targets without local consultation that might be inappropriate in nature and scale for the local area, and then penalising PIs who did not meet these. It was felt that it exacerbated the issues identified with the focus on numeric targets in relation to incentivising the “wrong” kind of behaviour, such as pushing people towards employment or self-employment that was not suited to them, or working with the “easy” cohorts of people with lower needs, in order to avoid penalties. Participants are keen to be able to work in a more meaningful way and to have a framework that recognises and supports this.

An additional concern regarding financial penalties was in relation to the difficulty these present for organisations with small or non-existent reserves and little capacity to absorb additional financial obligations. It was also pointed out that high performance, as considered by the targets, was not rewarded under the programme.

Participants wish to see a new programme without such penalties included. Some were also keen to see some form of reward or recognition for good quality work or performance, with the capacity to share good practice across the programme.

Importance of the theme *Financial Remedies / Penalties*:

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Do not include remedies in the next programme
- Consider ways to reward and share high performance

7 Reporting & Administration

7.1 Administrative Structures Perceived as Burdensome and Punitive

Participants regard administrative duties as being overly burdensome and out of proportion with what people experience in other funding programmes. Data summaries that can be accessed easily and charted would help PIs to report more effectively to LCDCs. The ability to manipulate the data would also improve time efficiency. IRIS is not particularly user-friendly with much time being spent on inputting data rather than actually working with programme beneficiaries, and is also regarded as being overly quantitative with insufficient qualitative measures. Participants feel that workers are taken away from developmental work with clients due to excessive levels of administration.

There is a possible doubling up of work with IRIS and other systems and this can be solved by using an integrated system that facilitates online communication between PIs, LCDCs and Pobal. A system that works well at the moment is the ETB-DLS system. For SICAP, there is a need for a system which reports accurate and timely information on a regular basis and preferably one which everyone can access in real time. If a new system is to be offered, it should be more user-friendly and offer a better CRM.

Participants would appreciate flexibility in reporting methods, with some using two systems as IRIS alone does not satisfactorily report on what they need to achieve their targets and thus avoid penalties.

There is a need to reduce both targets and the level of reporting required so as to improve time management and be of mutual benefit to PIs and clients. PIs feel they are spending their time reporting and trying to achieve difficult targets, rather than doing the work to help disadvantaged communities. Even experienced people are spending their time reporting rather than offering their expertise to the programme. More flexibility is needed with regard to the administration budget as the time being spent on reporting is not reflected in the budget.

The programme is felt to be overly focused on achieving targets, yet the focus of PIs needs to be the welfare of individuals rather than targets. There are also issues regarding performance clauses dictated in contracts as if a group fails to meet targets they may lose resources or face financial penalties. This ties back to the issues surrounding IRIS and information not being recognised as being incorrect until later – thus currently community development workers spend a large portion of their time in filling out forms rather than actually doing work on the ground. Many participants feel that they have had no input into how targets were set, and often targets do not reflect changing circumstances on the ground. A target driven system is regarded as being ill-suited for a scheme like this and is even felt to undermine the actual work being done.

There can also be a particular resource burden at certain times of the year at LCDC level, especially at annual plan and end of year approval. The actual reporting is regarded as being difficult for some people to understand as it is quite technical and complex, as well as too much of a focus on quantitative rather than qualitative information. Development workers are employed for developing projects; however, participants suggest that they are spending 50% to 60% of their time doing IRIS inputs and record maintenance. In previous programmes, workers were spending at least 90% of their time out working with communities. These reports have an impact on resource requirement and so are regarded by workers as crucial to complete.

Participants also felt a lot of time is spent in simply “trying to figure IRIS out”. This time spent on IRIS results in the neglect of client work and is ultimately adding to the 25% administrative budget. In addition, the lack of a joined up system for registration results in some candidates being involved in multiple programmes unbeknownst to the PI; an identifier through the PPS number was suggested as a possible solution. There is also felt to be a clear need for a system which can regularly report information in an accurate and timely fashion, preferably one that can be accessed in real time.¹⁵ Such a system would be complemented by the training and staff development of people involved in the implementation of SICAP.

Regarding administration costs, it was felt that the administration percentage needs to remain at 25% at a minimum. The SICAP programme by its nature requires a large number of staff, and the costs relating to overheads, equipment, and materials on this scale is considerable. Respondents also commented on the complexity and administrative burden of tracking VAT.

Consultees felt that the breakdown of the budget should be as follows: (1) overall core management costs; (2) administration; and (3) project costs. If the budget for core management costs is differentiated from administration/project costs, it will enable the programme to be seen as a core funding programme which is responsible for levering other programmes, and is judged on its ability for leverage.

Importance of the theme *Administrative Structures Perceived as Burdensome and Punitive:*

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Reduce administrative workload on workers through reducing targets and record requirements
- The focus of workers should be refocused on helping individuals, not hitting targets

¹⁵

Pobal provided the following clarification. IRIS is a live system and all information entered into the system is immediately available to be viewed.

7.2 Specific Issues with IRIS and Other IT Systems

IRIS is not regarded as being particularly user-friendly, with much time spent “feeding the system” which provides no real benefit for PIs or clients. IRIS only counts the people and gives no flavour or depth of the programme. Generally, participants believe that it is difficult to trust IRIS reports. The need for line-by-line checking and analysis can lead to a significant chance of human error. PIs have an issue with using systems such as Salesforce as they perceive this to involve a substantial capital spend from their own budgets and would rather this cost to be borne by SICAP. Many consultees felt that a new reporting system has to be more outcomes-focused. There was also mention of the need to be able to measure client progression through multiple interventions/ organisations. Currently, the reports coming from IRIS are seen by many consultees to be very poor, as are the visualisation options. IRIS is not perceived as being user-friendly and much time is spent inputting data into the system rather than working with programme beneficiaries.

The user interface and navigation of IRIS is felt to need improvement, in particular the CRM system. It is felt that there are limited options on IRIS to help PIs follow up with clients. The feeling is that PIs are “churning people” through the system with regard to the number of interventions rather than the quality of service.

Participants cited the incompatibility of IRIS with other programmes, for example the inability to integrate with SAP software, another system used by PIs. Other issues included the inability for IRIS to provide a live picture on programmes with PIs being able to see reports only once a year, with another being participants wishing for a tool that can pull out headline issues in real-time so they can then be addressed. IRIS also often leads to line-by-line checking which eats into PIs’ time to run successful programmes. Reports providing an overall summary of issues were regarded as being a more effective solution.

Regarding user-friendliness, the lack of instant feedback was particularly noted in relation to data quality. When a worker checks a week or so after initial entry their inputted information can sometimes be lost or has been removed. Alerts should be sent by Pobal regarding this so as to avoid financial penalties, as individuals believe they have inputted the correct information but may not realise until weeks later that the incorrect data was entered or ineligible participants had been registered and this data has been subsequently removed by Pobal as part of a data cleaning process.

Frustration was expressed regarding the inability to use CRM functions to enable follow up with clients. The navigation of IRIS also needs to be improved as moving between documents is especially time consuming, and there is feeling that the system was designed for the needs of Pobal rather than PIs or LCDCs. The number of folders and places where information can be lost is also quite large, with information difficult to find. In addition, the lack of a joined up system for registration results in some candidates being involved in multiple programmes unbeknownst to the PI. An identifier through the PPS number was suggested as a possible solution.

Participants would appreciate flexibility in reporting methods, with some using two systems as IRIS alone does not satisfactorily report on what they need to achieve their targets and thus avoid penalties: they would prefer to use a single system that allows for all the required information to be captured and reported on. This dissatisfaction was further explained by Pls and LCDCs stating that, as it is quite sales driven, IRIS is more suitable for a business and is not a system helping deprived people. ETBs have successfully used Salesforce previously; however, as mentioned above, the cost is a concern for Pls.

The need for a reporting system such as IRIS was acknowledged. However, Pls need to be able to get the information they need in a format which is easily accessible and which can provide detailed breakdowns. Much information is being input into IRIS with no subsequent control, access, or understanding. Adequate training on IRIS could assist with this, as would more immediate feedback from IRIS of rejected items¹⁶.

IRIS was viewed very negatively by consultees, with key problems including its time-consuming nature; its requirement for “too much box ticking”; and the sense that it is not reflective of actual work carried out nor the needs of the SICAP target audience. Many consultees mentioned frequent crashes and issues with accessibility and suggested that it “wouldn’t be tolerated in other sections”. IRIS reporting arrangements and forms were described as “off-putting”, comparing unfavourably to other funding programmes. Attendees felt that much of the heavy administration and data requirements within SICAP could be removed by having a dependence on audits. An additional weakness is that SICAP is essentially a contract between two parties while IRIS is being provided by a third party. This third party involvement creates difficulty in the other two fulfilling their obligations.

Importance of the theme *Specific Issues with IRIS and Other IT Systems:*

- **Very important:** raised repeatedly and consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Improve the user friendliness of IRIS, with particular focus on the CRM
- Provide greater flexibility in how workers can report and record their work

¹⁶ Pobal provided the following clarification in relation to IRIS training. IRIS training is provided by Pobal for SICAP. In 2016, for example, IRIS training was given to 76 individuals in seven sessions on advanced features in IRIS such as filtering, creating new data views, and creating charts and graphs.

7.3 Need for IRIS Training and Development

Participants believe there is a definite need for training of staff involved in SICAP delivery and oversight, with suggestions for a baseline budget for this training to be set aside and specifically funded as part of the programme. Participants reported that currently they are only getting training for SICAP “for free” – i.e. on the back of other programmes which do provide funding of training and staff development. People are currently depending on colleagues who, while adept at IRIS, may have not been formally trained in IRIS. More engagement is needed at local level between PIs, LCDCs and local authorities to ensure that everyone is fully briefed. One possible solution is introducing a mentoring and on boarding programme in training PIs to use software and reporting tools primarily in IRIS but also on other systems such as Salesforce.

The current training levels are regarded as insufficient and IT experts need to provide future training. It is also felt that IRIS needs to be overhauled by IT experts, as a new improved system would enable PIs and LCDCs to more easily access information as they are currently unable to tell if engagement with SICAP leads to a positive outcome for a disadvantaged person. An improved reporting system would also assist with communication from the Department, thus improving programme effectiveness. With “templates for everything” it is possible to record all quantitative data; however, there is a need to be able to see the local qualitative elements. More guidance could be provided to workers as to how to achieve the qualitative insights. Many participants reiterated the need for a measurement system that properly reflects the work being done.

Participants expressed a wish for more briefing sessions when new funding schemes are introduced so as to explain practicalities. One group member reported that the Programme Implementer comes into LCDC and SICAP subcommittee meetings weekly so as to facilitate a better understanding for all. There was also felt to be a need for training on SICAP with LCDC members. Regional support workshops are regarded as very useful and they assist in the understanding of SICAP.

Importance of the theme *Need for Training and Development*:

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Provide adequate IT training for staff and delivered by IT experts
- Provide a baseline budget for this training, specifically funded by the programme

7.4 Administrative Structures Exclude Potential Beneficiaries

Participants felt that the registration process needs to be looked at as the required level of detail is too high. It is regarded as micro-management and inappropriate for

the sensitive nature of many client situations. Many questions are considered too personal by PIs and designed to benefit Pobal and not necessarily the PIs or LCDCs. A further impact on services is the delay in processing cases. Due to backlogs, which for some organisation can be three months, the resources are not available to do call-backs which consultation participants feel can negatively impact on the quality of services provided.

Communication needs to improve between LCDCs and PIs: current issues at a local level should be identified and a better identification of targets for programmes is needed to improve the quality of SICAP 2018-2022. It is felt that some groups are being excluded from programmes due to current measurement and identification mechanisms. A point was also raised in relation to PIs attending LCDC meetings. Due to the contractual relationship in the event of a discussion regarding SICAP, the PI is obliged to leave the room. Participants suggested that this should only apply to decision making and PIs should be allowed to engage in general SICAP discussions as they have the most information on the ground. Additionally, it was also noted in certain areas there can be a lack of collaboration between groups, with participants feeling that the current relationship between PI and LCDC is to the detriment of the programme.

Participants discussed the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, in particular that areas generally categorised as affluent often include poorer areas that are not always taken into account. The effectiveness of the two interventions rule was also brought up, with participants feeling that every case is unique and adequate support should be offered to disadvantaged people to improve their case outcome.

Participants also felt that attention should be paid to improving the realisation and identification of disadvantaged groups. An example cited was in relation to Western island areas where the targets do not necessarily relate to the circumstances of the individuals concerned and thus were difficult to achieve. Another example in relation to very specific areas was the fact that SICAP materials are produced in English and those PIs working in Gaeltacht areas have costs in relation to translating materials into Irish for their beneficiaries.

Reviewing target groups could provide greater flexibility and enable more local inputs into how targets are set. A similar suggestion was that targets need to be periodically reviewed and set according to current needs rather than past achievements; previous numbers reflected the austerity period and could be adapted as employment continues to increase.

Participants also felt that SICAP should be focusing more efforts in targeting those who are harder to reach and having more accessible information on deprived areas would assist development workers in these efforts. Greater communication between LCDC and PIs would also help. Under previous programmes, research and evaluation roles added a lot of value but that is not felt to be the case now. For instance, research and evaluation was a core budget feature within the Local

Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) and core funding was provided for staff to input data and maintain all necessary paperwork.

Participants discussed the unique circumstances of each target group and that the elderly and disadvantaged women should be target groups. It was felt that there should be more flexibility in SICAP on a county or regional basis as each county/region has its own specific needs. In particular, there needs to be more flexibility in relation to areas designated as disadvantaged. There also needs to be discussion regarding the role of community groups and a partnership approach. The current reporting system does not reflect the number of local community groups supported, and there is a need to acknowledge the supports leveraged from other programmes required to work with local community groups.

It was felt it would be beneficial to provide more detailed breakdowns of information about the programme, perhaps incorporating a qualitative element on how the programme is performing and at what stage of development it sits at. There is also a need to bring quality into the programme on an individual client basis as the progression of individuals is limited if the number of available interventions is also limited. The programme is not perceived to support working with beneficiaries over longer periods of time, which would be of great benefit in working with hard to reach individuals – reducing the overall targets would be a potential option for facilitating this. Greater flexibility is needed to identify gaps and the focus needs to be concentrated on those receiving assistance rather than the number of interventions.

Importance of the theme *Administrative Structures Exclude Potential Beneficiaries:*

- **Important:** raised consistently across different consultations

Suggested solutions:

- Review the categorisation of target groups, ensuring no groups are 'left behind'
- Provide greater local flexibility to ensure each groups' unique circumstances can be met

8 Engagement with Beneficiaries

8.1 Overview

A small number of focus groups were undertaken with a range of SICAP beneficiaries. These sessions were to provide an opportunity to hear from some typical beneficiaries of the programme, including individual clients and local community groups. In order to ensure some balance between urban and rural areas, beneficiaries involved in programmes run by West Limerick Resources and PAUL Partnership were asked to take part in the sessions.

Three separate focus groups were held:

- Session 1 took place on 30th March 2017 in the Rathkeale House Hotel and was attended by around 70 beneficiaries involved in programmes run by West Limerick Resources;
- Session 2 took place on the 30th March 2017 in Limerick City with 25-30 beneficiaries involved in programmes run by PAUL Partnership (generally new communities / new communities, young people, and people starting their own businesses after having been unemployed);
- Session 3 took place on the 5th April 2017 in the Dunraven Arms Hotel in Adare, and this session was attended by approximately 20 representatives of the community groups who have worked with both West Limerick Resources and PAUL Partnership.

The beneficiary engagement outputs are being presented separately in this report as the views of beneficiaries do not align with the thematic areas discussed with other stakeholders. Beneficiaries do not have key contributions to make in respect of, for example, reporting and administration, or appropriate targets and measurement within the programme.

Several key points should be noted regarding the feedback received from beneficiaries:

- There is a limited amount of recognition of SICAP as a programme or brand – most beneficiaries identify with their PI or their direct support worker, and pay little attention to which programme the support comes through.
- Many beneficiaries receive support from multiple programmes funded from different sources, and so some of their comments may reflect this situation.
- The summary of feedback presented below has been edited to focus specifically on those aspects most closely related to SICAP, rather than other programmes or wider community needs outside the scope of SICAP.

8.2 Summary of Individual Focus Group Session Feedback

8.2.1 Session 1: Rathkeale

Overall, beneficiaries were very happy with the training and individual supports they had received via SICAP. When encouraged to identify issues or obstacles, among the responses were the following key elements:

- More work experience opportunities, both within and separately from training courses.
- More focus on next step supports at the end of training courses, e.g. progression training, mentoring, coaching, and so on.
- Closer liaison with local employers to inform training courses, in terms of running courses designed to develop or increase key skills needed by the employers.
- Pls should ensure that trainers and employers understand the needs of SICAP participants and facilitate these.

8.2.2 Session 2: PAUL Partnership

This session comprised three groups of beneficiaries, the key issues for whom are set out by group below.

Group 1: New communities

The beneficiaries appreciate the role of SICAP in enabling them to be occupied and develop skills whilst they await decisions on asylum applications, but they do not have the chance to build on these by accessing mainstream training and education. They would welcome more integration opportunities with the broader community, e.g. events to share culture, food, customs, and so on. Their core concern, however, is the length of time it takes to process their applications, leaving them in “limbo”, and their focus was not therefore on incremental improvements to SICAP.

Group 2: Other employment clients

Overall, the beneficiaries in this group were happy with SICAP supports they had received. It was noted that progression from SICAP training should be available to ensure that participants can move towards employment.

Group 3: Start your own business clients

The main concern of this group related not to SICAP but to the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA) and the administration of this by the Department of Social Protection. When discussing SICAP specifically, however, some participants felt that there wasn't enough exploration into whether the client is better suited to employment or self-employment. Related concerns included a perception that the ultimate success or failure of the business was less relevant within SICAP due to the

focus on having targets for numbers taking up the BTWEA (rather than on maintaining a successful business). It was felt that PI staff did not have enough time to give clients the aftercare they may need after getting onto the BTWEA.

8.2.3 Session 3: Adare – Community Groups

Community groups in the focus group in Adare were broadly positive about the support received under SICAP. They perceived the PI as a helpful resource. Issues and concerns included the following:

- The limitation of support to areas designated as disadvantaged was seen as too blunt, and participants wished to see the programme offer support where needed regardless of the designation of the locality.
- Mental health was identified as a key concern requiring focus in communities.
- Older people were considered to be a key group that should be supported regardless of where they live.
- Services for people with disabilities had been reduced and there was a desire to see them restored and expanded.
- Rural transport needs should be addressed.

8.3 Common Themes Arising from Beneficiary Focus Groups

8.3.1 Overview

The following are some of the cross-cutting themes that emerged from the sessions with beneficiaries.

8.3.2 Accessing the Programme

The focus groups highlighted the variety of means by which beneficiaries discovered the programme, including word of mouth, posters in local stores or referrals from the Department of Social Protection. The availability of information about the programme is also complemented by the “helpfulness” of staff, who beneficiaries regarded as being very easy to communicate with and willing to assist those who have difficulty navigating registration.

Many beneficiaries stressed that it is crucial that SICAP is able to work with disadvantaged individuals in all areas and not solely those currently classified as disadvantaged. Focusing purely on disadvantaged areas can lead to some individuals feeling “left behind”, especially as living in a more prosperous area can be isolating if the individual is considered disadvantaged. Additionally, there is a need for recognition of the impact of local authority policy, such as in relation to the settlement of migrants in the community or the placement of social housing tenants in different areas. Community groups often lack the facilities to help individuals to integrate into their new locality and may not be aware of their local SICAP programme.

8.3.3 Positive Aspects

Beneficiaries regarded many aspects of the programme positively, with the most commonly cited being its strong local focus and the willingness of staff to make information and instructions accessible to all. Describing the programme as “well-structured” and enabling the measurement of individuals’ progress, beneficiaries also appreciated the benefits accrued through the building of confidence and self-esteem.

Despite the positive impact made by PIs, many felt that it would be beneficial were they to offer more of a physical presence, as well as extending the range of services and further training in some localities.

8.3.4 Future Needs

In spite of the widespread positive opinions of beneficiaries regarding the programme, there were nonetheless a number of areas in which it was felt that changes could be made in the future. Most frequently cited included:

- provision of facilities for community activities;
- the level of regulation required for small community groups;
- greater engagement with older people.

The level of regulation and associated costs required for community groups was viewed as too high, and there was a desire to see SICAP assist groups in relation to these concerns.

Additionally, it was felt that SICAP needs to devote more time to engaging with older people in all areas rather than solely in areas of disadvantage. Beneficiaries felt that as older people tend to be those who have the requisite time and community involvement to volunteer, they would have a lot to offer in increasing social capital in the community.

8.3.5 Barriers to Access

There was consensus among beneficiaries at the focus groups that the provision of services ought to take into account the differing needs and circumstances of individuals availing of the programme’s services. Examples cited included the availability of skills workshops, language issues, and the availability of public transport which was frequently cited in rural areas. This particular issue could be in part supported through car-sharing arrangements however there is a need to be mindful of the potential financial impact of attending courses for individuals who need their services.

Appendix 1: Focus Group Organisations

The following organisations participated in the focus groups:

1. Community Work Ireland
2. Department of Education and Skills
3. Department of Rural and Community Development
4. Department of Social Protection
5. Disability Federation of Ireland
6. Economic and Social Research Ireland
7. Education Training Boards
8. Focus Ireland
9. IBEC
10. Irish Local Development Network
11. Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed
12. Irish Youth Justice Service within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs
13. Mental Health Ireland
14. Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
15. National Collective of Community Based Women's Networks
16. National Economic and Social Council
17. One Family
18. Pobal
19. Solas