



A Framework for Partnership - Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation

Forum Report No. 16

December 1997



A Framework for Partnership - Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation

Forum Report No. 16

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM

Copies of this Report may be obtained from the:
GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS SALES OFFICE
Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

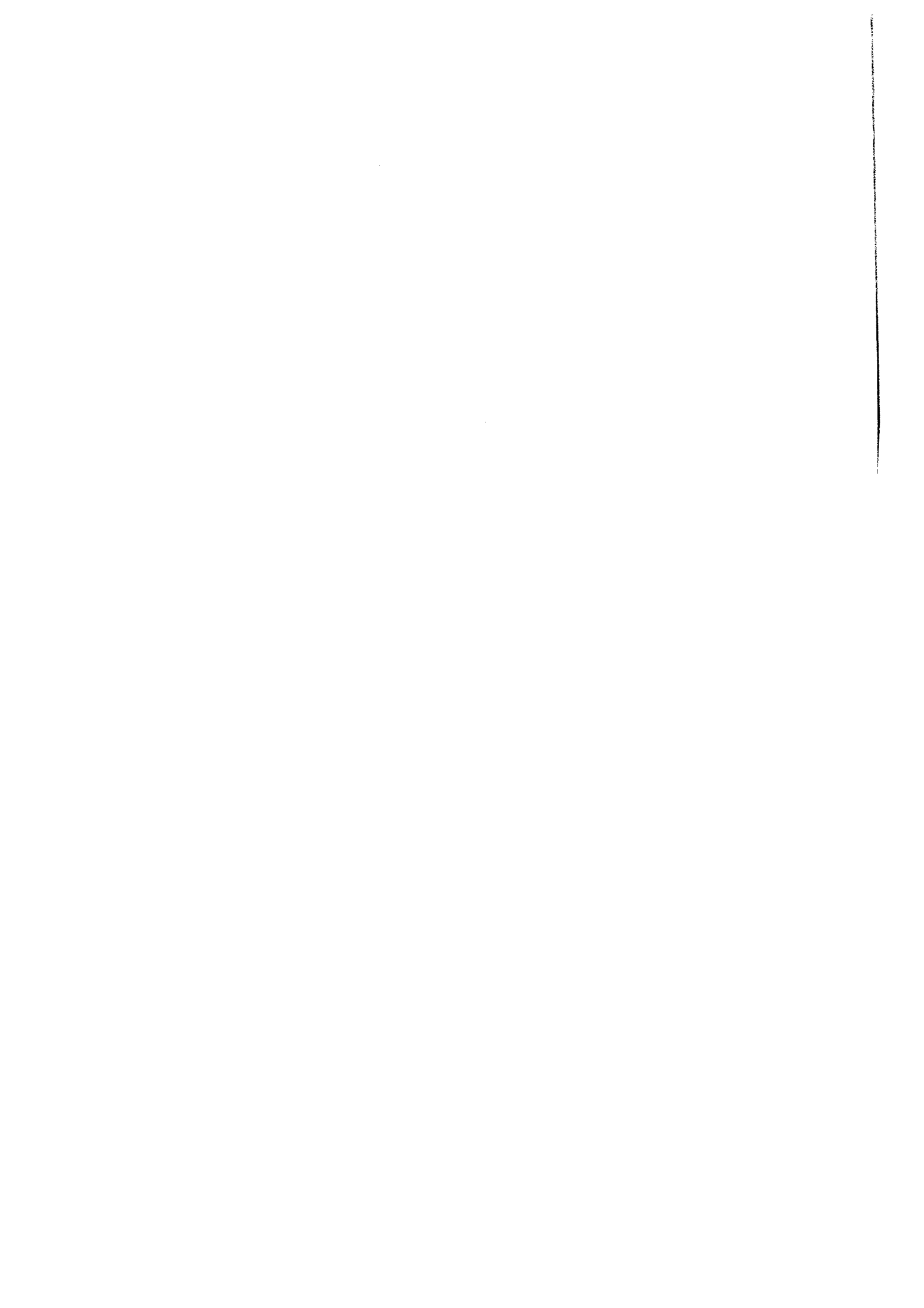
or

THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FORUM
Centre Block, Government Buildings,
Upper Merrion Street, Dublin 2.

Price: £5.00

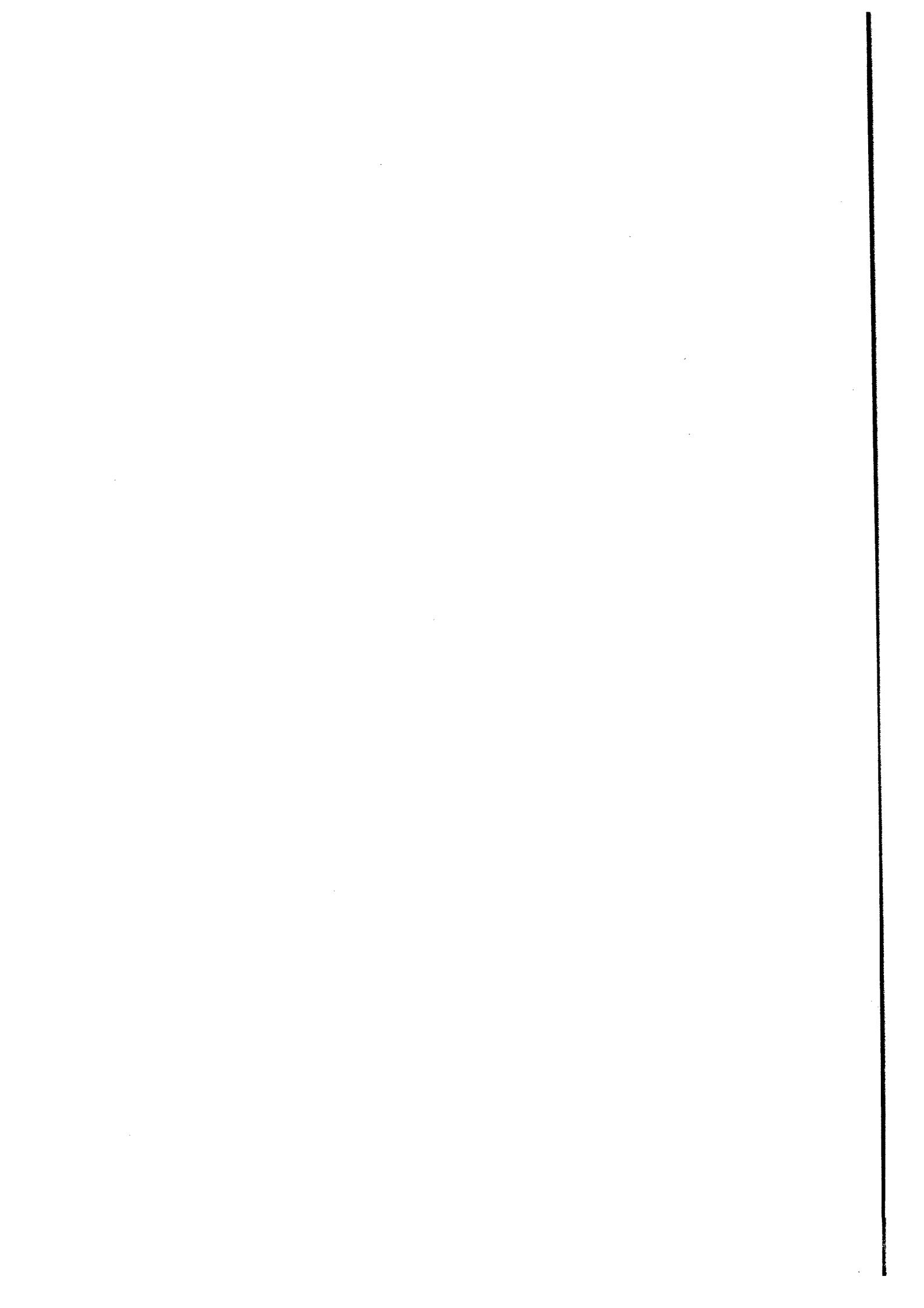
(PN 4669)

ISBN-1-899276-18-1



Contents

	<i>Page</i>
	iii
Section I	3
Section II	9
Section III	17
Section IV	31
Section V	51
	63
	64



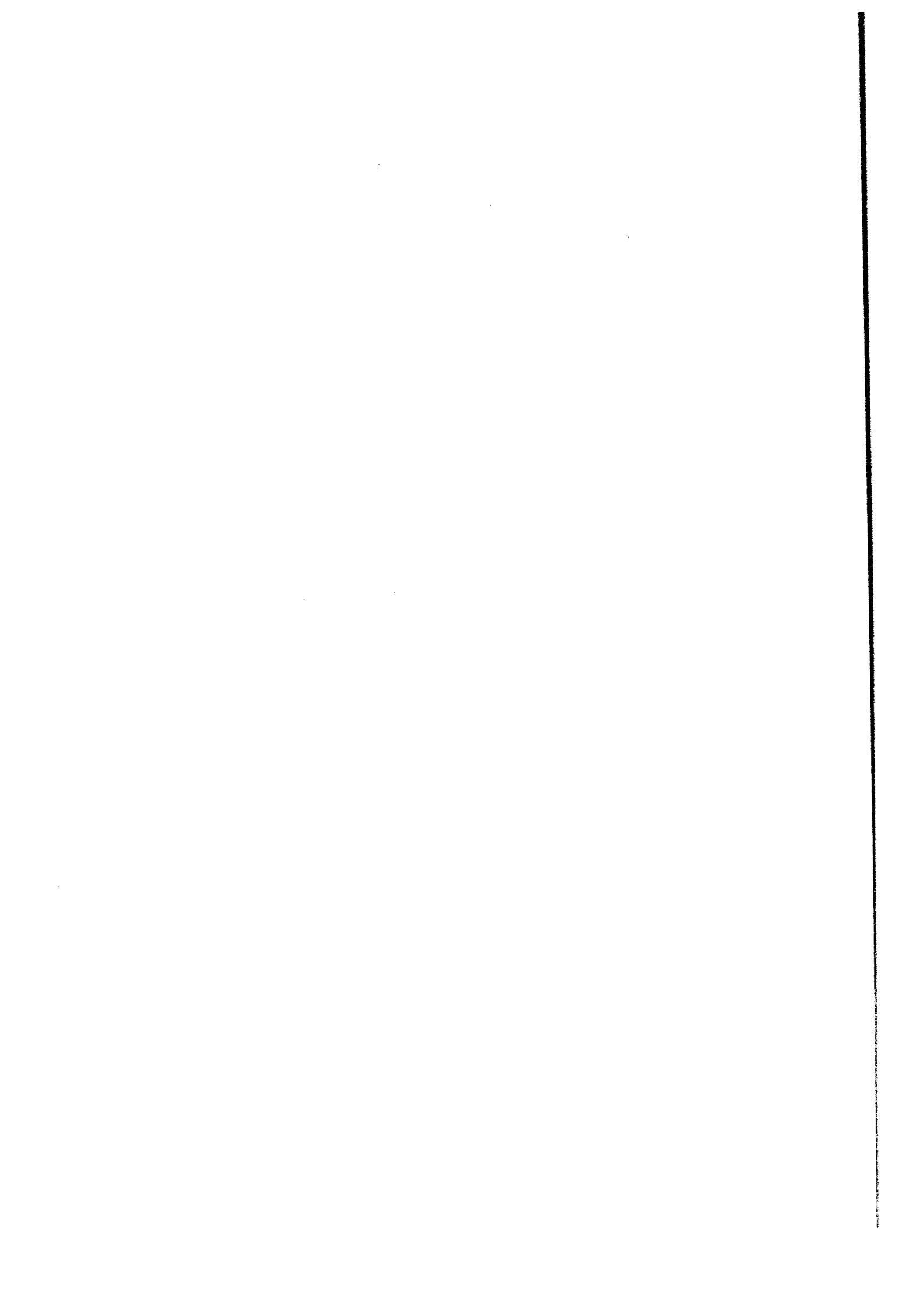
Foreword

Foreword

1. The present Report has been prepared as a contribution to underpinning and enhancing the social partnership approach, with particular reference to:
 - identifying its strengths and weaknesses;
 - distinguishing a number of ways it might be further developed and strengthened; and
 - seeking to make more effective and coherent the functions, roles and structures of the two main social partnership institutions which currently exist at national level, namely the Forum and that of the NESC.
2. The Report represents the outcome of a long and extensive process of consultation and preparation, involving separate hearings with each of the Three Strands who are represented on the Forum, informal hearings with some of the key players who have been historically involved in the development of social partnership since the late 1980s and two Plenary Sessions of the Forum.
3. It is being submitted to Government for the purposes of (i) bringing to their attention the broad thrust of the main issues and options for institutional reform which were identified in the above work process; and (ii) serving as an input to the Government's planned review of the future roles and operations of the Forum and the NESC, whose terms-of-office expire at the end of the year. Given the sensitivity and complexity of some of the issues raised, the Report is not necessarily supported in all its details by the full body of Forum Members. In relation to Section V of the Report, some Members wished to have the implications for the NESC discussed more fully and considered that, in any case, it would be appropriate for the NESC itself to report separately to Government on these issues.
4. Finally, the Forum wishes to record how much it is indebted to Professor Rory O'Donnell of the Graduate School of Business in U.C.D. for his remarkable contribution, commitment and expertise in the preparation of this Report. The Forum is also grateful to Professor Charles Sabel, Columbia University New York, Professor Paul Hirst, University of London, and Madame Marjorie Jouen of the European Commission for their work as facilitators in the preparatory work.

Section I

Introduction and Structure of the Report



Introduction

Background

- 1.1 In its Opinion No. 4, entitled *Post-PCW Negotiations: A New Deal?*, the Forum noted that the emergence of partnership approaches at local, regional, national and EU level was creating new sets of relationships between elected representatives, officials, trade unions, employers and the community and voluntary sector. While it was not possible to be sure that these are leading to an integrated and coherent approach, the Forum was in no doubt that these initiatives represent a significant shift from an over-centralised and bureaucratic structure, towards a more devolved, participative and inclusive system of government.
- 1.2 The Opinion went on to highlight the risks of duplication and weaknesses of co-ordination in the emerging partnership arrangements. Consequently, it argued that there is a need to develop a new *Framework for Partnership*, which would establish key operating principles to underpin the partnership approach, and identify proposals on how best it could be deepened and widened at national, regional, local and enterprise levels. It noted that the Government was, in any case, due to undertake a review of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the Central Review Committee (CRC), with a view to identifying the scope for alignment between the future roles and operations of these bodies.
- 1.3 Partnership 2000 made references to the Forum's planned report on a *Framework for Partnership*, and envisaged this as an input to a review of the monitoring procedures of the national partnership programme. This present Report is the Forum's contribution to the ongoing development and re-design of partnership arrangements.
- 1.4 The Report focuses on partnership arrangements at the national level. This reflects the fact that the Forum's discussions have revealed some problems in the national partnership arrangements, and consideration of these is more than enough for a single report. There is no doubt that the frameworks for partnership at regional, local and enterprise levels, and the relationship between partnership and representative democracy also require consideration. Indeed, in relation to the regional and local level, the Forum's Opinion No. 4 of August 1996 suggested that development of a *Framework for Partnership* should take account of the OECD report *Ireland: Local Partnerships and Social Innovation*, the Report of the Constitution Review Group and the Report of the Devolution Commission. The Forum remains convinced that these deeper institutional and constitutional issues must receive attention in the coming years. The focus of the current Report on partnership arrangements at the national level reflects the incremental and experimental nature of Irish social partnership, and the superiority of that approach over grand institutional design.

- 1.5 While the existence of problems usually implies the need for change, there is a definite fear of change. There would seem to be two sources of this fear. One derives from the sense that, with economic growth near 10 per cent, we are doing something right, and to change the partnership arrangements might undo that. The other derives from the feeling that a change of partnership arrangements now, might reverse some desirable aspects, which have only just been achieved. Both these sources of fear reflect uncertainty about how and why social partnership works, when it works, and how and why it fails, when it fails. It seems that to gain the confidence to make changes, we need to examine social partnership in some depth.
- 1.6 This Report provides an analytical discussion of the difficulties and possibilities which now confront social partnership at national level, and draws on that to discuss possible new arrangements. The argument advanced here could be supported also by the many episodes and experiences recounted by the different Strands of the Forum during discussion of the issues. However, as will be seen, given the nature of the problems and the diversity of perceptions, each episode, experience and problem tends to be *owned* by different groups. Use of any one episode or problem to support a particular part of the argument, might gain some adherents and lose others.

Structure of the Report

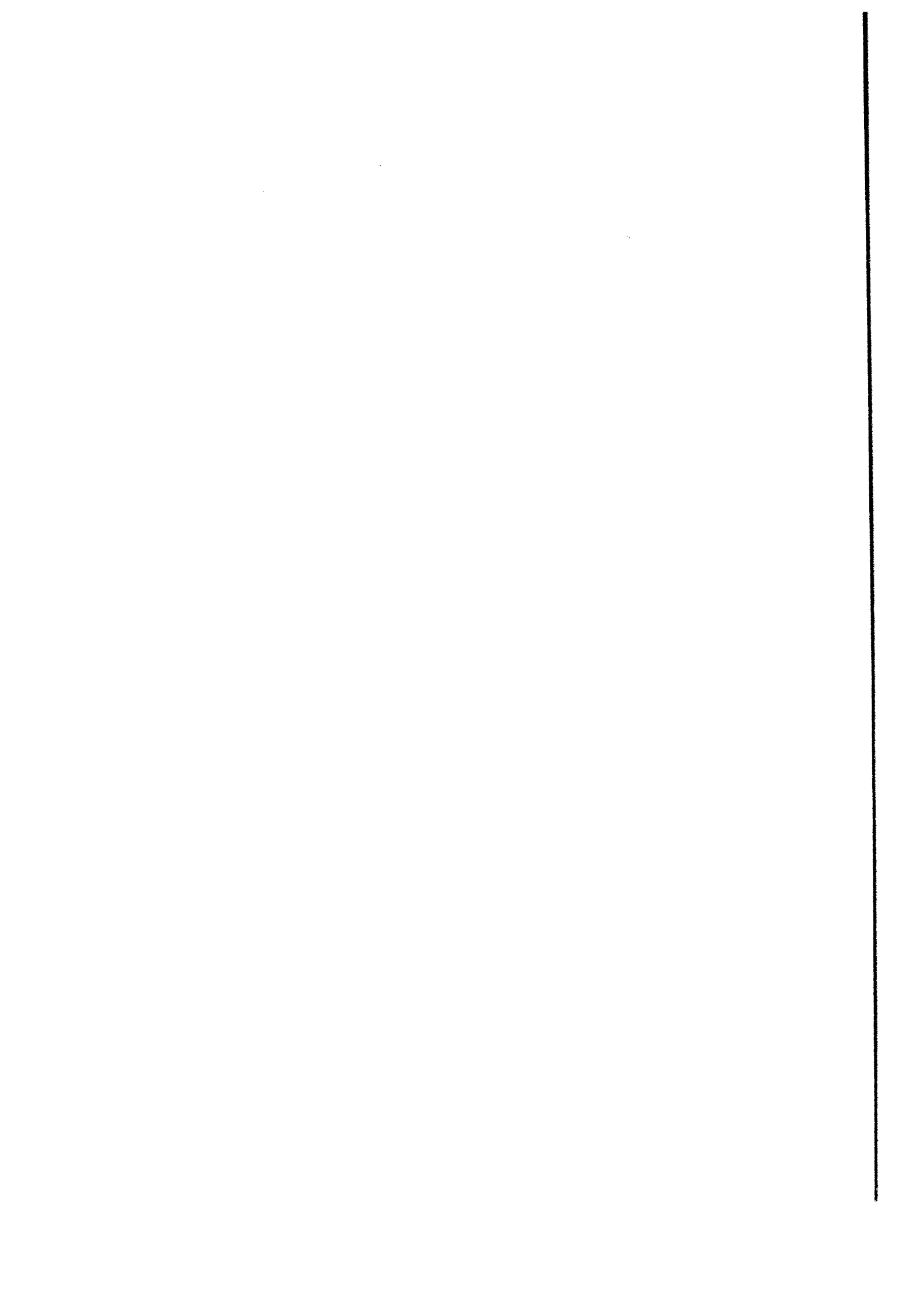
- 1.7 The Report is arranged as follows. **Section II** summarises the remarkable achievements of social partnership and argues that design of a new framework for partnership must begin from the practical tasks of social partnership, rather than seek an ideal model. The main tasks confronting partnership are also identified. **Section III** asks whether the existing social partnership arrangements are equal to these tasks. While key principles are shared by all parties, there is a widespread sense that the arrangements in place are not adequate. Seven weaknesses in current arrangements are identified and discussed. These range from limited terms of inclusion for new groups, to the problems of monitoring arrangements. A striking feature is that many of the problems uncovered are experienced by all the organisations involved. This is particularly true in relation to linking national representation and/or policy formation to local action, and the related problems of effectiveness and monitoring. The gap between social partnership and representative democracy is also identified as a significant issue which needs to be addressed.
- 1.8 **Section IV** sets out the elements of a renewed vision of social partnership. It begins by arguing that, contrary to the beliefs of some, partnership does not demand of those who participate a deep level of agreement on the nature, direction and justice of the whole economic and social system. The main pre-condition of partnership is a problem-solving approach, and problem-solving itself has few pre-conditions. However, one, potentially important, finding is that a problem-solving approach depends on both the design of partnership bodies (NESF, NESC etc.), which shapes relations between social partners, and on the internal organisation of social partners. Section IV then suggests that hints about how to solve the problems can be found in three trends. Social partners are changing i

ways which allow a new view of what a social partner is now. Central government, in Ireland and elsewhere, is changing in ways which allow us to identify new roles for the centre and national partnership. Traditional forms of policy-making, implementation and monitoring are under stress, in ways which allow us to envisage a new combination of all three. It is critical that our partnership arrangements are in tune with these trends; indeed, these trends suggest solutions to the problems discussed in Section III.

- 1.9 **Section V** summarises the argument and suggests a number of options for future partnership arrangements. The first option, which underpins all others, concerns the composition of the existing partnership bodies. The remaining options concern much closer institutional and procedural relations between NESF and NESC, involvement of both bodies in monitoring, more involvement of civil servants in NESF and the conduct of NESF projects by teams.

Section II

The Development and Current Tasks of Social Partnership



The Development and Current Tasks of Social Partnership

(i) The Emergence and Achievements of Social Partnership

- 2.1 Ireland's social partnership approach is one of the most significant developments in public policy in the European Union. The current social partnership approach was initially a reaction to the severe economic and social crisis of the mid 1980s. Drawing on an analysis agreed at the NESC, government and the social partners recognised the need for a sharp correction of the public finances and a negotiated sharing of the burden of adjustment. This was embodied in the Programme for National Recovery, 1988-1990.
- 2.2 In the PNR, the partners agreed the rate of increase of private and public sector pay for a three-year period, the evolution of key tax and spending programmes and policies to address specific social and economic problems. That programme was followed by three other social partnership agreements and all are listed in Box 1.

Box 1

The Social Partnership Programmes

1988-1990	Programme for National Recovery (PNR)
1991-1993	Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP)
1994-1996	Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW)
1997-1999	Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness

- 2.3 These agreements reflected a shared view of the range of economic and social policies which are necessary to achieve international competitiveness, employment growth, a reduction of inequality and high levels of health, education and welfare provision. Like the PNR, negotiation of each of these programmes was conducted on the basis of a **strategy** report agreed beforehand at the NESC. The Forum made strategic inputs also to the PCW and Partnership 2000 negotiations. The main social partnership institutions/bodies are described briefly in Box 2. In addition to these institutions, a partnership approach has developed in several specific policy areas, and is reflected in a range of Task Forces, such as the Task Force on the Travelling Community and the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.

Box 2.

The Main Social Partnership Institutions/Bodies

NESC - (National Economic and Social Council) established by government in 1973 to provide advice on the development of the economy and the achievement of social justice. The Council comprises nominees from agricultural organisations (6), business and employers (6), trades unions (6), nine others nominated by Government, and Secretary-Generals of a number of Government Departments.

NESF - (National Economic and Social Forum) established by government in 1993 to contribute to the formation of a wider national consensus on social and economic matters. It comprises a *First Strand* drawn from the Oireachtas (15), a *Second Strand* of the traditional social partners (15), and a *Third Strand* (15), representing groups such as the unemployed, women, disadvantaged, youth, older people, people with a disability and environmental interests.

CRC - (Central Review Committee) was set up under the PNR to meet on a regular monthly basis to review and monitor progress in implementing the Programme. It continued under the PESP and PCW. In addition to Government Departments, its membership comprised representatives of employer and business organisations (6), farm organisations (12) and trade unions (11).

Partnership 2000 - replaced the CRC with a new four pillar structure (see Box 3) and a monitoring and developmental role also for the NESC and the Forum.

- 2.4 The social partnership approach has developed significantly in the past decade. While each programme involved agreement on pay and the main parameters of public finance, the range of economic and social policies incorporated in the programmes have been widened over time. For example, the PESP initiated a new, area-based, approach to long-term unemployment. This gave rise to the establishment of the Area-based Partnerships.
- 2.5 The range of partners has also widened. In 1993, the Government established a new partnership body, the NESF. Its membership encompassed what are sometimes called the *traditional social partners* - trade unions, employer associations and farm organisations - and representatives of the community and voluntary sector and of the main political parties in the Oireachtas who had previously been outside the social partnership arrangements.
- 2.6 The changing participation in social partnership was also marked by a widening of the membership of NESC and new approaches to negotiation and monitoring of the national programme. While the first three programmes were agreed by the traditional social

partners, the current programme, Partnership 2000, was negotiated and ratified by the community and voluntary sector also and accorded this sector a social partnership status as one of the four pillars of partnership. The parties involved are listed in Box 3.

Box 3.

The Social Partners

In addition to Government, there are now 4 Pillars to the social partnership process:

Farming Organisations	IFA, ICMSA, Macra Na Feirme and ICOS
Community and Voluntary Organisations	INOUE - Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed NWCI - National Womens' Council of Ireland NYCI - National Youth Council of Ireland Protestant Aid Society of St. Vincent de Paul CORI - Conference of Religious of Ireland Community Platform ¹ Centres for the Unemployed
Trade Unions	ICTU - Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Employer and Business Organisations	IBEC- Irish Business and Employers' Confederation CIF- Construction Industry Federation CCI - Chambers of Commerce of Ireland ITIC - Irish Tourist Industry Confederation IEA - Irish Exporters' Association SFA - Small Firms Association

- 2.7 The period of social partnership since 1987 has been one of significant economic and social progress. The PNR and subsequent agreements have contributed to our outstanding economic performance. In tandem with fiscal and monetary policy, they have helped exporters to compete on international markets. By fostering industrial relations stability, certainty in relation to pay costs and pay moderation, the agreements have provided an environment conducive to investment and economic and employment growth. Between 1987 and 1996, this country experienced:

¹ The Community Platform was set up by the Community Workers Co-operative, the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed, the National Women's Council of Ireland, Irish Rural Link, Irish Traveller Movement, Focus on Children, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, One Parent Exchange Network, Conference of Religious of Ireland, Forum of People with Disabilities, Pavee Point, Community Action Network, European Anti-Poverty Network, and Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas as a mechanism to organise the participation of this sector in the Partnership.

- average annual economic growth (GDP) of almost 5 per cent (7.5 per cent over the last 3 years); at the same time, GDP per head relative to the EU average has moved from 64.4 per cent in 1987 to 98 per cent in 1996, on a purchasing power parity basis (or from 56.5 per cent to 87.4 per cent on a GNP basis);
- an increase of 240,000 in employment;
- a fall in the unemployment rate from 16.8 per cent in 1987 to 10.3 per cent (standardised basis) in 1996;
- a reduction in the General Government Debt/GDP ratio, from 117 per cent to 72.7 per cent; and
- significant improvements in take-home pay, taking into account reductions in income tax and PRSI, and abolition/reduction of levies.

At the same time there have been notable improvements in social policy, in areas such as social welfare, health, education, and housing provision but social exclusion, long-term unemployment and poverty remain as major policy issues to be addressed.

(ii) The Current Challenge: Self-Sustaining Competitiveness and Inclusion

2.8 In its recent Strategy into the 21st Century, NESC identified Ireland's current challenge as self-generating competitiveness and social inclusion:

"While negotiated, multi-annual, programmes at national level would seem to remain necessary, the task now is to make competitiveness and social solidarity self-sustaining. State strategy remains crucial, but public policy is most effective when social actors are responsible for ever-improving competitiveness and social inclusion. Consequently, the Strategy document and policy must provide a framework for building competitiveness at firm and industry level. Likewise, they must provide a framework in which social inclusion and fairness are achieved by harnessing Ireland's high levels of community involvement, extensive voluntary associations and absence of deep social divisions. This requires extending the benefits of social partnership by consciously promoting a wider distribution of the fruits of growth and wider participation in policy deliberation and implementation".²

The present initiative by the Forum to prepare this Report can be seen as an invitation to elaborate on how this can be achieved.

(iii) The Tasks of Social Partnership from 1997 to 2000.

2.9 *Partnership 2000* identified three essential economic and social challenges facing our society:

- maintaining an effective and consistent policy approach in a period of high economic growth;

² *Strategy into the 21st Century*, NESC Report No. 99 (1996)

- significantly reducing social disparities and exclusion, especially by reducing long-term unemployment; and
- responding effectively, at both national, sectoral and enterprise level, to global competition and the information society.

2.10 Within the macroeconomic framework and constraints which underpin the Programme, it is important that a new *Framework for Partnership* facilitates the social partnership process to respond as effectively as possible to these challenges through, inter alia:

- enterprise-level partnerships to promote competitiveness and innovation, as a basis to improving living standards and providing more jobs;
- making the policy process and public services more effective and open under the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS);
- the strengthening of economic capacity and strategic approaches, including local-level partnerships, to equality and social inclusion issues;
- encouraging flexibility and rapid responses to the increasing pace of global competition;
- the issue of governance and developing the relationship between social partnership and representative democracy, at both national and local levels; and
- effective monitoring and benchmarking to ensure adherence to the terms of the commitments contained in Partnership 2000.

2.11 In all of this, the capacity of social partnership arrangements and institutions to be innovative and provide a leadership role in analysing and preparing for change and exploring new ways of doing things is of crucial importance. At the same time it must be recognised, however, that social partnership is limited to certain policy areas and is not designed to provide a panacea to all our society's economic and social problems.

2.12 A central argument of this Report is that the above tasks pose profound challenges to all organisations involved in public policy: central government, local government, State agencies, business associations, trade unions, farmers and voluntary and community sector groups. A key factor in this is the need for social partnership organisations to engage more fully in each others interests and to move forward together in resolving more coherently and effectively issues of common interest.

2.13 A framework for developing enterprise-level partnership is in place. Consequently, this Report focuses primarily on the institutional arrangements of national partnership and, particularly, the functioning of, and relationship between, NESF, NESC and the monitoring arrangements under Partnership 2000. But, since the relationship between policy-making, implementation and monitoring are now of central importance in the area of social inclusion (and many other policy areas), the SMI and the NAPS must become a focus also.

2.14 Finally, the challenge to party politics and the role of representative democracy was particularly highlighted in the Forum's discussions with particular reference to the issue of governance and accountability and developing and strengthening the links between

representative and participative democracy at both national and local levels.

- 2.15 At local level, this is being addressed by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government through the development of a new framework to integrate local government and local development post 1999. This framework is premised on the understanding that representative democracy is strengthened if informed by participative democracy and the involvement of local people. The principles underpinning the initiative are based on power-sharing, a willingness to change and a focus on the wider community.
- 2.16 At the same time, the need for the development of a model to link partnership at national level with the Oireachtas was strongly flagged and this must also be addressed. One possible option put forward was that the existing institutional mechanism of the Joint Oireachtas Committees might play a useful role in this regard. The relationship between representative democracy and social partnership is further discussed in Sections III and IV of the Report.

Section III

**Are the Social
Partnership
Arrangements Equal
To These Tasks?**

Are the Social Partnership Arrangements Equal To These Tasks?

(i) Introduction

3.1 The development of Irish social partnership since the late 1980s has seen the emergence of a range of institutions, procedures and principles. As outlined in Section II, the Forum believes that these constitute important progress in public policy. To underline this, and set the scene for the rest of the Report, these principles are summarised in sub-Section (ii) below. While these principles are shared by all parties, there is a widespread sense that the practical arrangements in place are not adequate to achieve the tasks which now confront social partnership. Consequently, this Section proceeds to outline seven problems identified during the Forum's discussions:

- The limits of consensus
- The limited terms of inclusion
- The difficulty of linking national representation and/or policy formation to local action
- Effectiveness in achieving real change
- Proliferation of partnership bodies
- Problems of monitoring
- The relationship between social partnership and representative democracy

(ii) Agreed Principles

3.2 Significant progress has been made in developing a partnership approach to economic and social policy. The institutions and organisations of social partnership have been described in Boxes 2 and 3 in Section II. The focus here is on the guiding principles which have emerged from these developments, and their adequacy to the tasks outlined. These principles were set out in Chapter 11 of Partnership 2000, "*Action on Partnership and Monitoring*", as follows:

1. Partnership through this national agreement involves, in particular, a shared understanding of the key mechanisms and relationships in the formulation and implementation of policy.
2. The partnership process reflects inter-dependence between the partners. The partnership is necessary because no party can achieve its goals without a significant degree of support and commitment from others.
3. Partnership is characterised by the problem-solving approach, in which various interest groups address joint problems. Partnership involves trade-offs both between and within

interest groups. The partnership process involves different participants on various agenda items, ranging from the principles of national macroeconomic policy to the specifics of local development.

4. All social partners accept that the benefits of economic growth be shared by all citizens in a manner that reflects this country's commitment to social solidarity and a better quality of life for all our people.

5. It is important that arrangements should be put in place at national, sectoral and local level, including the workplace, to benchmark and monitor the Partnership.

3.3 These ideas are shared by all parties and form the basis for future development. The Forum reiterates the importance of a shared understanding of key mechanisms, inter-dependence, a problem-solving approach, trade-offs both within and between groups, and of involving the appropriate partners in different policy areas. However, it believes that interpreting these principles and putting them into practical effect needs ongoing attention. This is so because of a set of issues which came to light during the preparatory work on this Report. For example, in some instances there is limited shared understanding, diverse views on the extent and nature of inter-dependence, distrust of the differential participation on different policy agendas, a frequent absence (and some outright rejection) of a problem-solving approach - leaving only trade-offs.

(iii) The Limits of Consensus

3.4 As outlined in Section II, the partnership approach has involved a growing consensus on the goals and methods of a range of economic and social policies. This consensus has been effective in aligning economic actors to consistent approaches and in sustaining government in strategic policy-making to address both economic and social problems. Notwithstanding this, the first of the seven problems identified, concerns possible limitations of consensus. The emphasis on a *shared understanding* and *consensus*, in the description of social partnership, can be misconstrued or exaggerated, however, in ways that can undermine the effectiveness of partnership.

An exaggerated notion of consensus

3.5 In discussion of the rationale and framework for partnership it became clear that the emphasis on *shared understanding* and *consensus* is seen in different ways. The language of partnership can, if not carefully used, create a somewhat exaggerated notion of consensus. This exaggerated notion of consensus is not helpful. It encourages the idea that the process requires a very deep level of agreement on the nature and direction of the whole social and economic system. Given the large differences of power and resources which characterise our society, it is validly pointed out that no such consensus exists. Indeed, if partnership is premised on such a deep level of agreement, then some who are interested in reducing the inequalities of power and resources, feel they must dissent from aspects of the partnership approach. It is argued in Section IV (i), that partnership does not require that

deep level of consensus. The preconditions for effective partnership approaches are less than is sometimes believed.

- 3.6 A related weakness is that participation in partnership requires prior acceptance of analyses and policy approaches agreed in bodies which are not seen as adequately broad. This reflects the fact that inclusion in partnership structures and arrangements is seen as incomplete or inadequate (see sub-Section (iv) below).

Bland Consensus at the Price of Innovation

- 3.7 A second possible problem is that the emphasis on consensus can produce bland agreements, which are little more than the lowest common denominator of what various partners will agree. Consensus of that sort is of very limited use.
- 3.8 An equally serious problem is that consensus could serve to prevent innovation. A policy system dedicated to a narrow notion of consensus could stifle exploration of new approaches. Consensus may be interpreted to mean uniformity, in which case it will fail to reflect the real economic and social situation in Ireland.
- 3.9 Some observers and participants in public policy believe that the consensus, or partnership approach, is bound to reduce policy to the lowest common denominator. On that view, consensus is more harmful than beneficial, since it undermines the strategic *choices* which are necessary to good government. The Forum does not accept this general scepticism about consensus. Indeed, it believes that social partnership has, in general, enhanced the strategic focus of Irish public policy. Nevertheless, it recognises that consensus can give rise to the problems noted above.

How Social and Economic Change Occurs

- 3.10 In emphasising consensus, social partners and government may, over time, lose sight of the way in which social and economic change occurs. Change occurs when people and resources are mobilised in new ways. Such mobilisation can occur through enterprises (engaging people to do new things), through public provision (for example, people using the education system to create new possibilities for themselves) or through self-organisation (citizens organising to address a shared problem). Most social and economic change involves a combination of all three routes. What they have in common is the fact that nothing happens unless people are mobilised, and that change involves a disturbance of an earlier equilibrium.
- 3.11 Implicit in all of this is the need for a shared understanding of where we are, where we want to go and how we want to get there. An excessive, or badly understood, attachment to consensus can lead partners and government to focus on agreement, rather than the mobilisation of people and resources. Agreement, in the formal sense, is only the beginning. Indeed, the view of partnership outlined in Section IV, explores why agreement should not be separated from implementation.

(iv) The Limited Terms of Inclusion

The Challenge of Inclusion

- 3.12 The development of social partnership in the past decade has involved a significant focus on the problems of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. While this was initially reflected in policy positions, the issue of inclusion in partnership itself became a focus of discussion some years ago. Following a concerted campaign and argument by the community and voluntary sector, significant steps were taken to widen participation in partnership beyond the traditional social partners that were seen as essential to macroeconomic management. This is evident with the initial establishment of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Employment and the subsequent formation of the NESF, the development of local partnerships, State support for community development in disadvantaged areas, the extension of the membership of NESF (to include an individual from the INOU among the Government nominees), the establishment of a number of task forces in the equality area and the development of the new four-pillar structure which emanated from the negotiation of Partnership 2000.
- 3.13 The Forum sees inclusiveness as a most important feature of a framework for partnership which would be effective and just. It recognises that this is a new challenge, on which little guidance can be derived from traditional models of social partnership, such as those developed in the Scandinavian countries or Austria in the post-war period. Consequently, it agrees with an experimental and incremental approach to the development of social partnership in general, and the widening of inclusion, in particular.
- 3.14 Nevertheless, as explained below, the Forum believes that the terms on which inclusion in partnership has been widened have not been entirely satisfactory. This is a key argument of this Report.

The Widening of Inclusion has been Partial

- 3.15 The widening of inclusion has clearly been partial. While the Forum has had a wide membership, some of the groups in the NESF have been insufficiently represented in other bodies. This is a significant factor, given the complex combination of agenda setting, underlying analysis, policy discussion and implementation which characterises the policy process (see Section IV (iv) below). Among some groups, it serves to heighten ambiguity and reservations about the idea of consensus (discussed above). At the same time, it creates the possibility that the traditional social partners will fall back on a consensus established elsewhere, rather than engage fully. It serves also to undermine the distinctive roles of different partnership bodies, such as NESF, NESF and the CRC. Given the partial inclusion in the overall policy system, groups seek to undertake agenda-setting and underlying analysis in whatever bodies they are members of. For example, this can limit the Forum's focus on its distinctive role of policy design and implementation. This, in turn, encourages Forum Members to *act in their roles* as representatives or spokespersons, rather than engage in problem-solving on policy design and implementation.

- 3.16 At a more general level, the limited or partial representation of certain groups in some partnership bodies can encourage unrealistic and exaggerated ideas about the nature and significance of those bodies. The sense that agenda-setting, analysis or bargaining of an entirely different sort is occurring elsewhere, can undermine the quality of dialogue and problem-solving here. An opportunity to shape the agenda, the underlying analysis, and the strategic policy principles would seem to be a necessary condition for effective consensus-building and problem-solving on policy design and implementation. It is not, of course, a sufficient condition.
- 3.17 The inadequacy of the terms on which inclusion has been widened is clearly of particular concern to organisations in the Third Strand. However, the argument set out above, suggests that it has also created difficulties for organisations in the Second Strand. Furthermore, an important finding of this Report is that many of the other problems in our current partnership arrangements are experienced by all organisations involved.

A Perceived Hierarchy of Partnership Bodies

- 3.18 The terms of inclusion may also be the reason for a most unfortunate and inaccurate perception, which is held in some quarters, but challenged by others. That perception, is of a clear hierarchy of social partnership organisations, in which the NESC shapes the decisions made in the CRC (or equivalent), which in turn has higher status than the NESF. It is not the perception of a hierarchy that matters; if people perceive a hierarchy, that perception can be enough to confirm their expectations. What matters is the idea of strategy and decision-making which goes with that hierarchical perspective. Implicit is the idea that the goals, strategies, policies and instruments of a wide range of public policies are determined at the NESC, formalised and quantified in bargaining at the CRC, and implemented through the public administration system - with NESF invited to comment on implementation.
- 3.19 In several respects, this is an inaccurate view. Admittedly, it is not easy to describe the exact nature of the existing policy system involving the NESC, NESF, the social partners and government. Indeed, that system is changing as changes in the economy and society alter the relationship between the elements of public policy: strategy formulation, policy-making, implementation and monitoring (see Section IV (iv) below). On some occasions strategy is as much about agreeing things we can do nothing about, as agreeing detailed strategic action. That is no small thing, and few countries achieve it. It has allowed Irish policy and the social partners to then look for solutions in a circumscribed space of possibilities, and to avoid fruitless debates about macroeconomic alternatives, which would make current hard choices unnecessary.
- 3.20 In specific sectoral policy areas (such as health, welfare, industrial policy) individual departments and agencies are adopting a more strategic orientation. On different issues, NESC and NESF have each provided a strategic input to policy-making. As experience shows, these partnership institutions can significantly redirect national strategy where they produce a strong consensus on a new line of action or a new perspective, and where that new perspective has a persuasive force which commands the assent of the politicians and the

wider society. A clear example of this is provided by the Forum Report No. 4, *Ending Long-Term Unemployment*. This impact on policy may be immediate and direct, or it may operate more slowly and indirectly, through shifting the parameters of discussion or creating policy experiments which, in time, call for a reorientation of mainstream policy. It is important that this range of possibilities is recognised and accepted. In addition, it seems impossible to predict what kind of influence any particular piece of work by the partnership bodies will have. That depends on the dynamic of a particular policy area at a given time.

A Narrow View of Functional Inter-dependence

3.21 The terms of inclusion in the partnership process also seem to sustain diverse views on the logic of social partnership. As noted in Section II, a central focus of the PNR was on the public finances, pay settlements and adherence to the macroeconomic disciplines of the EMS. That programme succeeded in establishing the basis for a resumption of economic growth, because it aligned key economic actors to a coherent and consistent overall strategy. In analysing that recovery, NESC drew attention to the functional inter-dependence between the exchange rate, wage bargaining and public finance.³ Since then, the idea of functional inter-dependence between economic actors has figured prominently in analyses of Irish social partnership. This requires some discussion because different views on it underpin divergent views of the logic of partnership.

3.22 An overly narrow reading of these developments has encouraged some to think that functional inter-dependence consists only of the inter-dependence between government, employers and trade unions. Indeed, some focus only on the macroeconomic outcome which they jointly shape. While that inter-dependence is clearly vital, it is not the whole picture. The idea of social partnership as based on macroeconomic inter-dependence, is not helpful in addressing a range of issues which have subsequently emerged. These include structural reform,⁴ enterprise-level issues and, most of all, social exclusion and unemployment which have been consistently highlighted by the Forum in its work.

3.23 One effect of the narrow view of inter-dependence is to see different aspects of social partnership as having distinct rationales: while the macroeconomic partnership reflects the *functional* inter-dependence of government, employers and unions, partnership approaches to exclusion, unemployment and social issues rest on a *moral* claim.⁵ To the extent that this conception has taken hold, it might be seen as a weakness in Irish social partnership, and plays a significant role in the problems under discussion. It does not take into account the way in which inclusive social partnership allows discussion on the concerns, knowledge and inter-dependence each group brings to the table.

3.24 It is an inaccurate perception, because it overlooks the way in which the prosperity and good of the society are, in fact, inter-dependent with the degree of social exclusion. As the Forum has emphasised

³ *A Strategy for the Nineties: Economic Stability and Structural Change*, NESC, (October, 1990).

⁴ NESC, (October, 1990), *op. cit.*

⁵ A distinction can be made between arguments for *admission* to the partnership bodies, based on moral claims, and the subsequent engagement *within* the process.

*“competitiveness and social policies represent two sides of the same coin, with improvements in social standards seen as key elements in the competitiveness formula and in society’s overall efficiency and cohesiveness”.*⁶

The functional inter-dependence is less immediate, less direct, but no less real for that.⁷ One of the claims for social partnership is that it encourages a strategic, as opposed to a short-term, orientation. A strategic approach to social and economic development is not consistent with the view that the issues of exclusion and disadvantage have a purely moral claim on the policy process and the wider society. The practical and functional effects of exclusion press moral considerations on all concerned with public policy.

- 3.25 The excessive distinction between issues of *inter-dependence* and moral issues, sustains an excessive distinction between *traditional social partners* and other groups. This is discussed in Section IV (ii) below.

(v) The Difficulty of Linking National Representation to Local Action

Diverse Experiences of a Common Problem

- 3.26 In the course of the Forum’s discussions, it quickly became apparent that a major concern is the difficulty of linking national representation and/or policy formation to local action. This concern was expressed in many different ways. Some highlighted the way in which participation in national partnership draws representatives away from the day to day problems within their sector. Some drew attention to the peculiar language used in national partnership and policy analysis, and the difficulty which members have in following it. Many cited great difficulty in communicating the purpose, meaning and benefits of national partnership reports and agreements to members on the ground. The remarkably heavy demands on national organisations was also cited as an explanation of the difficulty of maintaining meaningful communication between them and their members.
- 3.27 A striking feature of this situation is the diversity of perception and the commonality of the problem. ICTU tends to see the difficulty as a reflection of the enormous size of the trade union movement and the particular content of PNR, PESP, PCW and Partnership 2000. IBEC tends to see it as a reflection of the diversity of firm types and the natural focus of businesses on market signals rather than policy processes. Third Strand groups were also inclined to see the problem as one peculiar to them because of the range of organisations affiliated to or involved in the national groups e.g. the Community Platform has eighteen national networks and organisations participating, many with hundreds of affiliated organisations. Others see it as reflecting the range of interests and the depth of the difficulties which disadvantaged citizens confront, the limited resources of Third Strand organisations and the limited content, and potential, of social partnership agreements.

⁶ *Post-PCW Negotiations - A New Deal?*, Forum Opinion No. 4, (August, 1996).

⁷ The fact that the functional inter-dependence is less direct and less immediate does have consequences. There is a need for a more thorough analysis of the many ways in which economic and social issues relate to each other (see Section IV(i) and IV(ii), below).

Strand One Members see it as a reflection of the somewhat uneasy parallel existence of partnership and the Oireachtas.

- 3.28 While it is clear that these particular views have some validity, the more striking thing is that all groups face a similar problem: how to link national representation and policy formation with action on the ground? Indeed, that problem is not purely a result of participation in national-level partnership. Quite apart from national partnership, organisations face a major challenge in reflecting, resourcing and linking the creative, innovative, actions and beliefs of their constituencies and members.

Better Downward Communication?

- 3.29 An initial response to this problem is to seek better downward communication. While this may not do any harm, we are not convinced that it is a real contribution to a new framework for partnership. The reason is that this problem is not the only problem. It interacts with a set of other problems, discussed below, such that better downward communication is not sufficient to re-establish the link between national partnership and action on the ground.

More Formal Representative Structures?

- 3.30 A second response is to establish more formal representative structures within each organisation. Where internal representative and consultative structures are non-existent, this may offer some improvement. There is a minimum of representative structure, which is essential to ensure accountability in the deployment of resources. But the experience of the trade union movement suggests that complex representative structures are not sufficient to ensure adequate links between representation in national partnership and action/experience on the ground.

- 3.31 Alternatives to these traditional responses, are discussed in Sections IV and V.

(vi) Effectiveness in Achieving Real Change

- 3.32 While recognising the significant achievements of social partnership, almost all groups expressed some frustration and disappointment with the difficulty in turning participation in social partnership into real change. Members spoke persuasively about the need to “*get beyond the aspirational*”. Third Strand groups felt that the limited effectiveness applied particularly in the policy areas with which they are most concerned.

- 3.33 In this area, as in others, the history of social partnership since 1987 may be relevant. The initial focus on macroeconomic stabilisation, and the early success in that area, may have created a standard of effectiveness, which we now apply to other policy areas. Indeed, it is argued throughout this Report, that it may have created an idea of the route to effectiveness, which we also retain. An effective redesign of the partnership institutions might allow exploration of whether it is helpful to apply that standard of effectiveness and route to effectiveness in policy areas where complexity and diversity are greater. But, in order to support such a redesign, Third Strand groups want to be assured that new arrangements will not be used to support high standards and expectations on

macroeconomic matters, but low standards and expectations on social exclusion and other problems.

- 3.34 In discussing the limited effectiveness in achieving change, four types of explanation were offered. The first was that it reflected lack of real power or influence in national-level negotiations. A second was that it reflected our limited knowledge of what works in many difficult policy areas. A third explanation was that, even where the partnership bodies (such as the NESF and the NESC) advocated certain approaches, effectiveness was limited by problems of implementation. A fourth explanation emphasised political will and the ability to refocus resources on new policy priorities.
- 3.35 It is not possible to decide between these explanations in any general sense. All four have some relevance, and their relevance varies across policy issues. Nor is it necessary to decide between them. If some of the arguments advanced above are accepted, and if the case developed in Section IV is persuasive, then we may be able to find a path forward which increases effectiveness, without having to choose between these general perspectives.⁸
- 3.36 Indeed, to these four explanations can be added a fifth, which complements them. The limited effectiveness of social partnership in achieving a reduction in exclusion and unemployment, reflects the limits of the shared understanding on these problems. There has, undoubtedly, been significant development. Forum Report No. 4, *Ending Long-term Unemployment*, developed a shared understanding on the need for active labour market policies. But it now seems that this consensus does not reflect all aspects of unemployment, exclusion and inequality.⁹ A shared understanding on other aspects of exclusion and inequality is urgently needed. Consequently, a major consideration in developing the framework for partnership, is that the redesigned partnership bodies must have structures and agendas which (i) develop and extend the shared understanding and (ii) maintain the focus and priority on social exclusion. How to ensure that, becomes a critical issue in the redesign of the national partnership arrangements.

(vii) The Proliferation of Partnership Bodies

3.37 Almost all studies of partnership and the Forum's discussions draw attention to the proliferation of partnership bodies as a problem. Three types of problem seem to arise, or to be in danger of arising:

- a drain on resources;
- confusion about who does what; and
- dis-empowerment, rather than empowerment.

These are problems which arise in both national and local partnership structures.

8 Above it was argued that the terms of inclusion have been limited, and that this has had certain negative effects; that social change can only occur through mobilisation of people; that there are practical and functional, not just moral, reasons to address exclusion; that there is a real problem in linking representation in national partnership to action on the ground.

9 This is evident in disagreement over the balance between active labour market policies and community development in the work of Area-based Partnerships, in questions about the adequacy of existing concepts of 'exclusion' to reflect womens' labour market experience and choices, and in divergent views about the mainstreaming of certain 'social economy' pilot projects.

- 3.38 At national level, organisations find their resources severely stretched by their participation in NESF, NESC, Partnership 2000 monitoring meetings, task forces and forums, and on the boards and committees of numerous State agencies. Where the same individuals attend several of these, they frequently find the same discussion going on in each. Where different people attend, the organisation has the problem of ensuring consistency and co-ordination. At local level, organisations are stretched to participate in the range of partnership bodies which have emerged. Indeed, it proved necessary to establish a new partnership layer, the Community and Enterprise Groups, to co-ordinate the work of the other types of partnership.
- 3.39 The proliferation of partnership bodies can cause confusion of two sorts. First, at any given level, those involved can be confused, or confuse each other, about the distinctive role of different bodies. Second, the citizen, enterprise or community group can be confused about what body or structure is relevant in seeking to solve a particular problem. These forms of confusion can undermine the ability of social partnership to achieve practical results of any real value. They can also fuel opposition to social partnership, and support for a return to traditional forms of policy. To state the problem of confusion, is not to advocate rationalisation. Economic organisation is extremely complex. So is social organisation, especially in a society with complex new social problems and in a period when new forms of solidarity are emerging. A society which used partnership approaches to involve citizens and associations in governance of matters which affect them, would have a wide array of partnership bodies. This brings us to the third problem that can arise from the proliferation and expansion of partnership in recent years.
- 3.40 This problem is the possibility of dis-empowerment, rather than empowerment. This could occur if the development of partnership reduced, rather than increased, the direct participation of individuals and groups in problem-solving. In general, the development of social organisations, and their participation in partnership bodies and arrangements, has the potential to enhance their effectiveness and the participation of their members. However, in some circumstances, members can find their roles taken over by the professional staff of the organisation. In those instances, the gain in efficiency must be weighed against the loss of participation. The increasing need for direct participation by members of social partner organisations is discussed in Section IV.
- 3.41 Looking at these three problems, it is clear that the proliferation of partnership bodies, raises three sorts of issue: one concerns the relations between social partners; a second concerns the nature of each social partner; and a third concerns the work and approach of the various partnership bodies. The three issues are closely related, especially if the design of partnership institutions can shape the way partners relate to each other, and influence the way they develop internally. The next Section outlines a new vision of social partnership and addresses these dimensions. Section V suggests new arrangements for a more inclusive and effective partnership approach.

(viii) Problems of Monitoring

3.42 In discussion of a *Framework for Partnership*, the focus turned frequently to problems of monitoring. This is, of course, closely related to the problems discussed above. In reflecting on this, one person who has been deeply involved, said that under current arrangements "monitoring becomes a farce". This was a reference to the procedure whereby the social partners in the CRC/four-pillar structure, seek to interrogate civil servants, first, on what action has happened and, second, on what results have been achieved in some policy area. To answer the first of these questions, the civil servants have to make a similar query to the various layers of their own department, or to the relevant agencies. It is difficult for those involved in quarterly monitoring meetings to assess the meaning of the information which emerges. Meaningful answers to the second question - about the results achieved - are even more difficult to acquire in this way. To report these views, is not to criticise those involved. Nor is it to disparage the importance of accountability, and the right of central government to ask hard questions.¹⁰ Indeed, the purpose is precisely to move beyond praise or blame, to a serious discussion of what arrangements can assist more effective monitoring.

3.43 If these are the problems of monitoring specific parts of Partnership 2000, there are also problems in monitoring the progress of the overall partnership project, and its relation with the wider political, administrative and constitutional system. The Forum's discussions provided an opportunity for an initial deliberation on this larger question. It may be considered that there is no possibility of a commanding overview of the wide range of initiatives emerging, and that we can only aim to improve the monitoring of individual parts of Partnership 2000. Even so, four practical issues arise:

- First, how should more immediate monitoring arrangements be designed, so that they do not reduce the possibility of coherence across these initiatives?
- Second, would more explicit targets and timescales in partnership agreements facilitate a more effective monitoring process?
- Third, how can we ensure that successful experiments, with the possibility to radically improve social well-being, do not lie unnoticed?
- Fourth, within narrowly-focused monitoring arrangements, are there ways of exploring some of the deeper political, administrative and constitutional issues which are thrown up by the overall project of social partnership?

(ix) The Relationship between Social Partnership and Representative Democracy

3.44 The redesign of public administration should take note of the relationship between social partnership and representative democracy. This issue was raised a number of times during the Forum's discussions. While Strand One Members value their participation in the Forum, they perceive a significant gap between social partnership and elected

¹⁰ Nor is it to suggest that other instruments of monitoring - such as the Structural Fund Monitoring Unit - do not produce insightful reviews of policy successes and failures, nor that the social partners do not play an effective role in the work of those bodies.

representatives. The Forum recognises that this is a serious problem, which, if not addressed, could be damaging to both representative democracy and social partnership. While it has not proven possible to undertake a detailed analysis of this issue, the Forum believes that the following points should be noted in future discussions.

- 3.45 First, care must be taken in attributing the perceived decline in the role of the Dáil and Seanad to the development of social partnership. In countries with little or no partnership, there is discussion of the declining role of parliament, relative to the executive. This suggests that there are independent reasons for this trend.
- 3.46 Second, the dominance of consensus is sometimes cited as the cause of a perceived decline in interest in party politics. Care must be taken in attributing this to the emergence of social partnership. In many European countries without social partnership arrangements, there has been a distinct convergence of views on economic and social issues, reflected in changing inter-party competition.
- 3.47 Third, the extent and nature of the *gap* between elected representatives and social partnership varies. Government Ministers are closely connected to social partnership, and have active ongoing relationships with the social partnership bodies (NESF, NESC, etc.) and with individual social partners. A selection of Oireachtas Members have close links with social partnership, through their memberships of the Forum. However, they report great difficulty in sustaining their participation in Forum business, and a much more significant distance from social partnership among their Oireachtas colleagues. The gap between elected representatives and social partnership seems greatest, or at least most acute, at local government level. The emergence of numerous partnership structures at local level is sometimes perceived as a further erosion of the role of local government. This suggests that the issue of the relationship of social partnership to representative democracy is linked to the question of devolution. Indeed, one of the changes in the role of government under discussion in this Section, is delegation of functions to local or regional level, combined with new co-ordinating roles at national level.

Section IV

A Renewed Vision of Social Partnership



A Renewed Vision of Social Partnership

(i) The Limited Preconditions of Problem-Solving

The Argument in Outline

- 4.1 It was noted at the outset that perceptions of the problems in partnership differ somewhat across the social partners. These differences extend to the very rationale for, conditions of and nature of partnership. One view, is that partnership demands of those who participate a deep level of agreement on the nature and direction of the whole social and economic system. This view can produce ongoing exchanges, between and within strands, which undermine the effectiveness of partnership. The argument of this Section is that partnership does not require that deep level of agreement. The preconditions for effective partnership are much less than that view suggests.
- 4.2 This argument is developed by distinguishing initially between two different conceptions, or dimensions, of partnership:
 - functional inter-dependence, bargaining and deal-making; and
 - solidarity, inclusiveness and participation.
- 4.3 It is then argued that effective partnership involves both of these, but cannot be based entirely on either. Indeed, there is a third dimension which transcends these two:
 - deliberation, interaction, problem-solving and shared understanding.
- 4.4 The preconditions for this are less than is sometimes believed. In particular, they do not include a pre-existing consensus on the nature, direction or justice of the overall economic and social system.

The Tension Between Functional Inter-dependence and Solidarity

- 4.5 The first dimension/conception of partnership - which emphasises functional inter-dependence, bargaining and deal-making - has been discussed at some length above, and has figured in commentary on recent Irish partnership. Its most concrete manifestation is the mutual benefit of a core agreement between business, unions and government. There can be no doubt that this is an important dimension of social partnership. However, for a variety of reasons, this hard-headed view is not adequate, on its own, to describe or understand Irish social partnership. Among the reasons is the fact that the performance of the economy is not functionally independent of problems of exclusion and unemployment. Another reason is that a second dimension of partnership is also important.

- 4.6 The second dimension/conception is that which emphasises solidarity, inclusiveness, and participation. This has been an important theme in many of the Forum's Reports. NESC also invoked this in its recent Strategy Report, when it said:

"The Council believes that the widest participation in social life, economic activity and policy-making are inseparable and fundamental requirements for the well-being of Irish society. The inclusiveness and quality of relationships in social life, communities, economic life and public governance are goals in themselves. These are desirable, quite apart from the fact that inclusive and co-operative participation is productive - economically, socially and in public policy terms" (NESC, 1996, p. 175).

- 4.7 In addition, it suggested that "the partnership model of policy-making, business and industrial relations is also consistent with some enduring characteristics of Irish society" (NESC, 1996, p.65). This second dimension is also important in Irish social partnership.¹¹
- 4.8 The partnership process, and the policy-oriented discussion of it, combines these two dimensions/conceptions. To fall entirely into the first could be to validate the claim that the process simply reflects the power of the traditional social partners, especially if claims for the unemployed and marginalised are not included in the functional inter-dependence, and are seen as purely moral. To adopt a naive inclusivist view would risk reducing the process to a purely consultative one, in which all interests and groups merely voiced their views and demands. Ironically, this would lead, by a different route, to the same end-point; partnership would ultimately be no different from pluralist lobbying, in which the outcome favours those groups with the most resources.
- 4.9 These two dimensions are both present, but even together they are not adequate. While functional inter-dependence is wider than many think, its immediacy and visibility is certainly less in some problem areas than in others. The absence of a rock-solid effective basis of social solidarity, suggests that we resist the temptation to try to deepen and widen the partnership model by casting it as grounded in some organic characteristic of Irish society.

The View that Partnership Demands Deep Consensus on the Nature of the System

- 4.10 The view that partnership demands of those that participate a deep assent to the nature, direction and justice of the economic and social system, would seem to be based on a particular combination of the two dimensions/perspectives outlined above. It is based, primarily, on a heavy dose of the hard-headed view that partnership is about deal-making by powerful interests that cannot escape one another. The functional inter-dependence, which drives them to deal, includes unions, business and government, but does not include others. Since consensus follows self-interest, and is the pre-condition for agreement, it is hardly surprising that the consensus does not include the marginalised. Given the pre-existing consensus on the fundamentals, the agreement/compromise produced by national partnership is essentially about distribution. This hard-headed, even cynical, view, is

11 This is evident even in the PNR, which sought to rescue the country from a dire fiscal crisis. It is more evident in subsequent partnership programmes, where action on employment, unemployment, social exclusion and inequality was explicitly included. To say this is not to suggest that all are agreed on the adequacy of these provisions.

combined with a thin layer of the second perspective, which emphasises solidarity. Since partnership reflects pre-existing consensus, and since the claims of the marginalised are moral rather than practical, a social partnership that really included the marginalised is dependent on a new, and radically different, level of social solidarity. This perspective is questioned below, but this requires consideration of a third aspect of social partnership.

Deliberation, Interaction, Problem-Solving, and Shared Understanding

4.11 This third dimension of partnership transcends the two discussed above. Although the concepts of *negotiation* and *bargaining* distinguish social partnership from more liberal and pluralist approaches, in which consultation is more prominent, they are not entirely adequate to capture the partnership process. Bargaining describes a process in which each party comes with defined preferences and seeks to maximise their gains. While this is a definite part of Irish social partnership, the overall process (including various policy forums) would seem to involve something more. Partnership involves the players in a process of deliberation which has the potential to shape and reshape their understanding, identity and preferences. This idea, that identity can be shaped in interaction, is important. It is implicit in the description of the process as *dependent on a shared understanding, and characterised by a problem-solving approach designed to produce consensus*. This third dimension has to be added to the hard-headed notion of bargaining, (and to the idea of solidarity), to adequately capture the process. It is relevant to the question of exclusion, and to wider discussion of the nature of partnership.

4.12 The key to these features of partnership would seem to be the adoption of a *problem-solving approach*. As one experienced social partner put it, "*Society expects us to be problem-solving*". A remarkable feature of effective partnership experiments is that the partners do not debate their ultimate social visions. This problem-solving approach is a central aspect of the partnership process, and is critical to its effectiveness. This is not to suggest that partners abandon their social vision or the interests they represent. Their action in partnership is definitely informed by, and consistent with, the deep commitments which motivate their work in the public sphere. Indeed, the vision and values which attract people to join voluntarily associations of social partnership are probably more important now than in the past (see sub-Section (ii) below). Recognition of the prevalence of a problem-solving approach, and the limited debate on ultimate social visions, clarifies what has been said in the previous paragraph. Although the process can go beyond bargaining, and can draw the partners into a process of deliberation and action which can reshape their understanding, identity and preferences, not everything is at stake for those who participate.

4.13 This suggests that rather than being the pre-condition for partnership, consensus and shared understanding are more like an outcome. This, in turn, means that the shared understanding cannot be a static, once-off, condition. Indeed, the extension of partnership in recent years has involved some groups coming to share the prevailing understanding of the macroeconomic constraints, but simultaneously producing and disseminating a new understanding of the policy problem which concerns them most, unemployment. And, as

emphasised throughout this Report, that process of development and dissemination must continue, particularly on the subject of social exclusion.

4.14 Therefore, an adequate account of the process as it actually is, would combine all three dimensions:

- first, pure interest mediation (as reflected in words like *bargaining*, *inter-dependence* and *trade-offs*);
- second, a commitment to inclusion and a degree of solidarity; and
- third, the process of deliberation by which partners come to a shared understanding, a process of interaction to which they submit themselves, in which they *lose some of their sovereignty*, and in which they risk some of their identity.

4.15 These arguments allow us to re-assess the view that partnership is entirely dependent on pre-existing and widely shared beliefs. An approach which sees co-operation as standing on purely normative foundations confronts several difficulties. The most relevant of these is that such an approach overlooks the inter-active nature of political, economic and social processes. Ironically, an excessive emphasis on the normative basis of social partnership - seeking to ground it in a thick set of shared values - may lead to more pessimism than the more pragmatic approach adopted by the actors in recent years. A sufficiently thick set of values is unlikely to be found. But all we need are attitudes and values that are good enough to sustain public co-operation.

4.16 Behind this lies the possibility that the real deficit, or binding constraint, may not be social solidarity, but knowledge of the institutional forms which will make solidarity and democratic governance effective in current circumstances.¹² This highlights the key challenge, which this Report addresses, is to explore institutional arrangements to make partnership more effective.

4.17 In the right institutional context, skilled actors engage with one another in ways which (temporarily and provisionally) resolve conflicts, which cannot be decided in more general debate. They can even initiate practical measures of social solidarity and co-operation, for which no one can provide a compelling foundation. These can, in turn, disclose radically new possibilities of social and economic life. If this is correct, then the key task is discovery of the institutional arrangements which can assist this, rather than extended prior discussion of economic and social systems, democracy, solidarity and community.¹³ Furthermore, both Irish and international experience suggest that the discovery of those institutional arrangements is itself an experimental and practical process.

12 The main argument and proposals of the Report are not dependent on this possibility. It may be the case that, by enhancing the effectiveness of partnership and identifying innovations worthy of generalisation, the limits of solidarity will be revealed in resistance to the change which would result. But that situation would still be preferable to the current one, in which the achievements of social partnership are constrained by the seven problems discussed in Section III.

13 Discussion, in other fora, of foundational questions concerning these matters may, of course, throw important light on social partnership.

4.18 It is a remarkable, if not easily understood, fact that deliberation which is problem-solving and practical produces consensus, even where there are underlying conflicts of interest, and even where there was no shared understanding at the outset. It is also a fact that using that approach to produce a consensus in one area, facilitates the same approach in other areas. The key may lie in understanding what kind of consensus is produced when problem-solving deliberation is used. It is generally a provisional consensus to proceed with practical action, as if a certain analytical perspective was correct, while holding open the possibility of a review of goals, means and underlying analysis (see below). This type of agreement certainly involves compromise. But the word compromise is inadequate to describe it. Compromise so often fudges the issues which need to be addressed.

Problem-solving is the Pre-condition. What are its Pre-conditions?

4.19 It seems, then, that there are few pre-conditions for the partnership process. A problem-solving approach emerges as the main condition. What are the pre-conditions of a problem-solving approach? These also seem to be limited. Some practical suggestions are made in Section V. Three points are made here:

- Problem-solving relations between social partners can be helped or hindered by the design of the partnership bodies.
- There are also internal conditions for a problem-solving approach, within each social partner.
- A problem-solving approach is relevant at four different levels: agenda-setting, underlying analysis, policy-making, and implementation and monitoring.

4.20 That the design of partnership bodies can help or hinder relations between social partners, is confirmed by the experience of the partners over many years. Depending on their design and procedures, they can either encourage a commitment to co-operation or make it more difficult. That problem-solving depends not only on relations between partners, but also on the internal organisation of each social partner, is demonstrated in sub-Section (ii) below, where we outline a new view of what a social partner is now.

4.21 The third point, listed above, provides an opportunity to clarify what is meant by a *problem-solving approach designed to produce consensus*. The term *problem-solving* might be thought to refer only to action at the exact level at which a problem is experienced. This is not what is intended. Indeed, the argument here is that a problem-solving approach is as relevant in agenda-setting and underlying analysis, as it is in implementation or monitoring. It may seem strange that a problem-solving approach can be adopted in doing the underlying analysis of a social or economic problem - and it certainly conflicts with the traditional *scientific* approach, in which the underlying analysis is simply true or false. However, experience strongly suggests that certain analytical approaches are more likely to command agreement than others, and certain analytical approaches have more meaningful implications for action than others.

4.22 A problem-solving approach involves working within these approaches, while staying true to the evidence.¹⁴ Adoption of a problem-solving approach does not rule out fundamental differences of perspective, but it does involve using those differences in particular ways. A similar argument applies to agenda-setting. Besides emphasising the role of a problem-solving approach in all stages of the partnership process (agenda-setting, underlying analysis, implementation and monitoring), these points highlight the fact that the term *problem-solving* is more than a platitude, or a synonym, for *good* or *polite*.

What kind of Consensus emerges from NESC and NESF?

4.23 It was argued above, that to understand why problem-solving produces consensus, even where there are conflicts of interest, we should note what kind of consensus is involved. It was noted that the unsatisfactory terms of inclusion encourage exaggerated ideas of the nature and content of strategic agreement. It would be equally mistaken to focus only on the technicalities of government decisions, and thereby *underestimate* the significance of strategic consensus. This calls for a careful and frank look at the kind of consensus produced in the NESC and NESF, and at the role of that consensus in the overall system of public governance. The consensus produced in these bodies must be seen as a part of a complex process, which involves strategic orientation, policy-making, implementation and monitoring (see sub-Section IV (iv) below).

4.24 A definite characteristic of successful NESC and NESF reports is argumentation or reason-giving. In these reports, the social partners and others present the society not with a deal, however good, but with the reasons why a certain perspective or policy initiative has commanded their agreement. It is to the problem-solving and the reason-giving that we should attribute whatever success these bodies have had. This contrasts with the view which attributes their influence to their apparent focus on high level *strategy* or *policy-making*.

Conclusion: the Limited Pre-conditions of Problem-solving Social Partnership

4.25 Discussion among the participants has made it clear that it is possible to participate in partnership, while holding significant reservations about the value of the whole project, relative to some alternative strategy. These discussions also reveal that each partner is inclined to think that they are the only ones in that position. This can encourage an over-emphasis on the particular dilemma faced by each partner: "*Social partnership is alright for them, but is it consistent with the unique competitive pressures/historical mission/radical powerlessness of our organisation?*" The purpose of this discussion is not to deny that the dilemma is real; nor to suggest that organisations talk to one another about it. The purpose is, first, to emphasise the possibility of participating while still questioning. And, second, to suggest that the fact that all groups face this dilemma should, at the very least, influence the way it is discussed within each.

14 While this approach conflicts with an idea of scientific social and economic study which had its heyday in the 1960s, it is consistent with a more sophisticated, and realistic, philosophy of social science.

(ii) A New View of what a Social Partner is Now

1.26 It was argued in Section III that the unsatisfactory arrangements at national level have obscured a clear view of the nature of a social partner in the Irish context. In particular, they have prevented recognition of the extent to which social partners face similar problems. These problems concern relations between national organisations and local members, and the difficulty of achieving tangible results from the partnership process. To explore this, this Report sets out a new definition, or description, of a social partner, emphasising process rather than structure, and information rather than force.

The Traditional Idea of a Social Partner

4.27 In developing and studying Irish social partnership arrangements, we have tended to adopt ideas from countries with a longer tradition of partnership-type policy systems. One such idea concerned the very nature of a social partner. In international studies of neo-corporatist systems, there is a very clear idea of what a social partner is. This traditional idea is summarised in the left-hand box of Table 1. One key idea is that to be capable of negotiating and delivering, an organisation must have *social closure* or monopoly of representation of a given social group. For example, unions were seen as having a monopoly of representation of workers, and business associations a monopoly of representation of enterprises. This monopoly gave them an authorised jurisdiction or charter. A second element of the traditional idea was the emphasis on their functional roles. They were seen to have a definite functional role in the economy or a clear regulatory role. Indeed, many went so far as to say that only producer groups had the characteristics which make them capable of being social partners. The key activity undertaken by organisations with these characteristics was bargaining, with each other and with the government. In many respects, the logic of that bargaining is summed up in the next characteristic listed in the left-hand box: State intervention in the economy. It was because the State intervened extensively in the economy that it found itself deeply engaged with unions and employers' associations. Finally, each of the organisations which participated were *hierarchically* organised and *concentrated*. This gave them a clear *peak organisation*, which was capable of both representing and disciplining a large number of individuals and sub-organisations.

Table 1
Traditional and New Ideas of a Social Partner

Traditional idea of a Social Partner	New characteristics of a Social Partner
● monopoly/authorised jurisdiction	● continuous mobilisation
● function (economic or regulatory)	● co-ordination of functions
● producer groups	● actors in civil society
● bargaining	● information as key resource
● State intervention in the economy	● new forms of public advocacy
● hierarchy	- analysis
	- dialogue
	- shared understanding
	● actor, not just voice

4.28 Consciously or unconsciously, this idea of the nature of a social partner has influenced our thinking in Ireland. It underpins the idea, discussed above, that while the involvement of functional groups reflects *power*, the involvement of marginalised groups rests on a moral claim. It underpins the idea, held by some, that in order to participate effectively, all groups must take on the characteristics of traditional social partners. Ironically, it also underpins the contrary view, that there is an agenda to make Third Strand groups like traditional social partners, an agenda that should be resisted.

4.29 The central argument of this Section is that the traditional conception of the nature of a social partner has lost some of its relevance in Ireland. If we look carefully at the development of social partnership in this country in the past ten years, we get a very different picture. Furthermore, we get a picture which fits many of the Third Strand organisations involved, not just IBEC, ICTU and the farm organisations. The characteristics are summarised in the right-hand box of Table 1.

Continuous Mobilisation

4.30 The first is the fact that social partners are continuously mobilising citizens who have problems that need to be dealt with. Organisations cannot take for granted their role as representatives of a given group, with defined and stable economic or occupational roles. They must offer practical achievements and a vision of a better economy and society.

Co-ordination

4.31 Rather than relying on fixed functional roles, their strength is in co-ordination: they assist in defining and co-ordinating functions. Rather than having their base in producer groups their base is actors in civil society who have to respond to the unintended consequences of policy, economic change or action by other groups.

Information as the Key Resource

4.32 While the ultimate role of the traditional social partner was bargaining, and achievement depended on the power resources deployed in bargaining, this is no longer an adequate description. Economic change has fragmented these power resources to some extent, and shifts in popular opinion have made traditional social partners uncertain about how, and whether, they can deploy them. By contrast, *information* is the key resource which a modern social partner brings to the table. They are needed, precisely because the information is generated within their organisational ambit. They have the links, the capacity, and the contacts with what is really going on in society.

New Forms of Public Advocacy

4.33 In the place of the old form of bargaining, there are new forms of public advocacy. These are summarised in the right-hand box as *analysis*, *dialogue* and *shared understanding*. It is possible to bargain without discussing, and a lot of traditional bargaining was like that. At the other extreme, it is possible to analyse without putting yourself in the shoes of the actors and a lot of traditional social and economic science was like that. In between, there is :

combination of discussion, analysis and deliberation, which might be called *negotiated governance*. Irish social partnership, at its most effective, seems to be moving toward that model. This challenges social partner organisations to facilitate analysis and action at local level and feed this in to policy at national level, and again raises the issue of strengthening the link between social partnership and representative democracy.

Action, as Well as Voice

4.34 The final characteristic is that a social partner is an actor, not just a voice. Mobilising, organising, delivering and solving problems (with others), seems to be a feature of effective social partners. Indeed, these might be seen as *conditions* to be an effective social partner. The goals, methods and knowledge of organisations are shaped and reshaped in action. A continuous danger of the partnership approach is the slide to *talking shops*. Critics who describe social partnership in this way, often contrast it with the clarity and independence of traditional public policy, in which democratic decision is followed by executive implementation. That model is a lost paradise in many policy spheres, but this should not lead us to dismiss the danger of *talking shops*. Involvement in action, as well as talk, is one prevention against that danger.¹⁵ This feature of a modern social partner is related to a weakening of the traditional distinction between political work, self-help, charity and labour organisation.

4.35 The importance of action can also reflect the limits of representation. One of the possible effects of the many changes in the economy and society is to qualify the possibility of representation. This is discussed below. Its relevance here, is that it underlines the increased role of action, and of organisations that create and co-ordinate action. Furthermore, within that, there is an increased role of *direct* action by members, rather than action for members, or organisation for the purpose of representation.

The Origin and Extent of Change from Traditional to New Social Partners

4.36 This contrast between the traditional idea of a social partner and the new characteristics of a social partner is intended to highlight an important process of change. It is not offered as a definitive account of the origin of that change or of the extent to which it has occurred in various parts of Irish social partnership.

4.37 Many reasons could be offered to explain why the traditional social partner (described in the left hand box of Table 1) has become less relevant in many countries, and is giving way to a new social partner (described in the right hand box of that Table). These would include the shift from manufacturing to services, technical and organisational change in enterprises, the collapse of unskilled labour, the emergence of new occupational roles and work patterns, new information technology, high unemployment, the emergence of other complex new social problems, the difficulties of large-scale public administration, the development of new social movements and the growth of self-help or empowerment-oriented organisations.

¹⁵ It turns out, of course, that to be effective in action it is necessary to do a lot of talking, both within and between organisations.

4.38 While the movement from the traditional idea of a social partner to new characteristics is important, it is clear that this is happening at a different pace, and to a different extent, in various organisations. Some recognise a definite decline in their role as representatives, and pressure for new forms of service provision to members. Others see a less distinct shift in that direction. While the right and left-hand boxes of Table 1 crystallise the pattern of change, they are, of course, too neat, and should not be read as two mutually exclusive categories. Indeed, given the argument of Section IV (i) - that partnership combines bargaining, solidarity and deliberation - we should not expect all the traditional roles of social partners to disappear entirely. Nevertheless, the *new view of what a social partner is now*, outlined here, does open the way for careful reflection on the variety of organisations active in Irish partnership, and for a more constructive engagement between the strands/pillars.

Implications of the New Type of Social Partner: from Bargaining to the Internal Problems of Group Action

4.39 If these differences between the traditional notion of a social partner and a new social partner are accepted, then they have important consequences for a *Framework for Partnership*. The purpose is not to naively assume that there are now no differences between partners with a major economic role (employer associations, trade unions and farm organisations) and other partners. The purpose is threefold. First, to abandon the misleading traditional distinction. Second, to recognise the extent to which all partners face some common problems and challenges. Third, to find arrangements which make partnership work better, by helping each partner to address the particular difficulties they face.

4.40 The overall effect of these changes is a trend to convergence in organisational patterns, although, as noted above, that convergence is by no means total. We can now see that functional inter-dependence extends well beyond those involved in production. The functioning of the economy and policy now encompasses a wide range of social groups, and cannot succeed if problems of exclusion are not addressed (recall Section III (iv)). This means that new organisations in the community and voluntary sector must be added to the list of social partners. These new organisations are taking on many of the characteristics of social partners.

4.41 But, if the argument of this Report is correct, it might not be ideal if they took these characteristics off the old menu (the left-hand box in Table 1), rather than off the new menu (the right-hand box in Table 1). This is particularly so with regard to one function: representation. The old-type of community and voluntary sector had little role in representation. The blurring of the old distinctions between politics, community organisation, charity and self-help, has, appropriately, brought the community and voluntary sector much closer to public policy. But, in moving closer to public policy, it may not be possible to become *representatives*, in the way that social partners were in the past. This is so because some of the older social partners are finding their role in representation

declining, relative to their other roles.

- 4.42 To see this, we need to note that there is convergence in the opposite direction also. While the voluntary organisations are taking on some of the characteristics of the social partners, those social partners are taking on some of the characteristics of voluntary organisations. They can no longer rely on having an automatic membership; they must continually prove their relevance to their members, by demonstrating practical achievements and tapping into new forms of solidarity. Their members have opportunities for self-advancement (and self-development) not provided by the organisation. Their members value *direct participation* in decision-making, not just participation via representation. Their role as *representatives* is being balanced by their role as *service providers* to their members. And the kind of services which they are asked to provide is changing. All of these changes are pressing them to review and change their organisations.
- 4.43 This confirms that we must keep functional inter-dependence in perspective (as argued in Section IV (i), above). Functional inter-dependence was certainly a characteristic of social partners in corporatist policy models. But it now seems a mistake to have seen it as the *defining* characteristic. We should not allow the continuing relevance of functional inter-dependence to prevent us from looking carefully at ways in which traditional social partners are changing.
- 4.44 One aspect of this new view of the nature of a social partner, is that neither the *constituency* of a trade union or employers association, nor the *community* of a social organisation can be taken as given. They are shifting, such that they need to be continually re-created. Consequently, all claims to *represent* are contingent. No organisation can validly claim to represent a given section of society forever, or without direct involvement of the relevant citizens.
- 4.45 This new perspective on the nature of a social partner does not deny the existence of conflicts of interest between individuals, groups and the State. But it subtly alters the way we should understand them. Finding shared understanding and a basis for co-operation within these conflicts remains a key element of social partnership. Whereas the old model involved power bargaining with limited need for discussion, the new approach involves more interaction. A recognition of the role of interaction and deliberation has a most important, if surprising, consequence. In this interaction, each social partner is a stimulus to the other and must, therefore, be attentive to its own way of acting. Each partner must develop not only its own consciousness, but its *self-consciousness*: an awareness of how its statements and actions impact on others. Consequently, while rethinking the relation *between* partners, the new perspective also draws attention to the, equally difficult, internal problems of group action. This shift in perspective is particularly relevant, given the striking commonality of the problem confronting all social partners: the problem of linking national representation to local action (see Section III (v)).

(iii) New Roles for Central Government and National Partnership

The Attraction and Changing Relevance of the National Level

- 4.46 Frustration with several aspects of national partnership was noted in Section III. There is a sense that the process has limited effectiveness in achieving real change, and confronts difficulty in linking national-level partnership to action on the ground. Given this, an important part of a *Framework for Partnership* must be some exploration of the role which national partnership institutions and national government can play in various spheres of policy. The Forum's discussion of this suggests three conclusions.
- 4.47 First, in a highly centralised country, with traditional systems of public administration, there is a strong attraction to national-level organisation and representation. All groups see representation at national level as the only realistic route to policy influence. Consequently, a heavy emphasis on national-level partnership is an inevitable response to the centralised nature of the Irish State.
- 4.48 Second, several things have, until now, blocked a realistic view of how much is decided and determined in national-level partnership agreements. The fact that partnership began by addressing a severe macroeconomic crisis, encouraged us all to a somewhat exaggerated view of the decision-making power and effectiveness of a national-level agreement. As noted in Section III (iv), when we moved from macroeconomic to sectoral, social, welfare and labour policy, we discovered that agreement at national level has a different character and is, by itself, insufficient to achieve agreed goals. The partial and limited nature of inclusion (discussed in Section III (iv)), itself blocks a realistic view of the role of various partnership bodies and of the content and capacity of national agreements.
- 4.49 Third, Irish and international developments indicate that we may be witnessing an historical shift in the role of the centre and national government. The complexity, volatility and diversity of economic and social problems, and of social groups, is undermining the capacity of traditional, post-war, legislative and administrative systems. Parliaments find it difficult to pass laws which can accommodate the variety and unpredictability of situations which need to be addressed. Administrative systems designed for uniform delivery of a predictable range of services cannot meet the new needs and demands of citizens.
- 4.50 It is critical that the partnership arrangements are in tune with the capabilities of government and administration at different levels. This is not easy, since there is no longer a settled pattern of national, regional, local and sectoral policy-making and institutions. We can, however, paint a provisional picture of the way in which the role of central government is changing. The traditional roles of the centre are summarised in the left-hand box of Table 2. These roles reflect the power, autonomy and effectiveness of central government, as it was understood in most western countries in the post-war period. The democratic legitimacy of central government gave it the right and the ability to allocate public resources, direct the

operation of government departments and public agencies, and administer complex systems of public delivery and scrutiny. In addition, where corporatist-type systems existed, it had the role of underwriting the monopoly representation exercised by business associations and trade unions.

Table 2
Traditional and New Roles of Central Government

Traditional Central Roles	New Central Roles
● allocating	● policy entrepreneurship
● directing	● monitoring (obliging and supporting)
● administering	● facilitating deliberation
● underwriting monopoly representation	● protecting non-statutory organisations
	● supporting interest group formation

4.51 The third argument outlined above, is that changes in the economy and society have undermined the effectiveness of central government in many of these roles. This has drawn attention to the superior effectiveness of regional or local government, and many countries have decentralised significant areas of policy-making and administration. But it would be wrong to think that this involves a simple replacement of central government with local government. For a variety of reasons, central governments remain extremely important, and supranational government, such as the EU, is increasing rather than diminishing. Both aspects of this are plainly evident in Ireland. A striking feature of the development of social partnership since 1987, has been the role of central government, non-line departments, such as the Department of the Taoiseach.¹⁶ This is so, even in the experimental partnership approach to local development. Several studies have attributed importance to these *vertical relationships*. This might be described as *centre-led decentralisation*. It is important that we explore the nature of this central government activity, rather than take it as confirmation of the old central roles, discussed above.

New Central Roles

4.52 The new roles of central government are summarised, tentatively, in the right-hand box of

16 There is definite evidence of innovation in other government departments and agencies also. Indeed, much of this is in the area of social exclusion and job creation.

17 It is clear that central government retains a major role in allocating public resources and in administering certain systems of public provision.

Table 2. Once again, these are not presumed to have entirely replaced the traditional roles, listed in the left-hand box.¹⁷ They summarise a direction of change which is of great importance to social partnership.

- 4.53 Policy entrepreneurship seems an important characteristic of successful policy at both national and EU level. Irish Governments and the European Commission have adopted an experimental approach in several policy areas. This is partly driven by the scarcity of resources, but has the interesting effect of stimulating new ideas and, on occasion, prompting innovative re-design of mainstream policy. A definite emerging role of the centre, is the authorisation, co-ordination, protection and financing of experimental approaches.
- 4.54 Monitoring is listed as a role of the centre in the emerging system. This requires explanation, since it does not refer to monitoring in the traditional sense, and hence the word *monitoring* may not be ideal. The very changes noted above suggest that central government would have difficulty in accumulating, checking and interpreting the masses of information necessary to monitor a wide range of public policies and programmes. What we have in mind is the role of central government in obliging and assisting others in monitoring and benchmarking. In addition, we do not mean monitoring in the sense of checking the *implementation* of programmes, the *goals* and *methods* of which are *defined once and for all by central government* (see sub-Section (iv), below, for further discussion of this). What we have in mind is government's role in obliging and assisting monitoring, and in altering both the methods, and sometimes even the goals, of public policy and provision in the light of systematic comparison of successes and failures.
- 4.55 The next new role listed in the right-hand box, refers to the role of the centre in facilitating communication and joint action between social interests/organisations. Given the difficulty of directing and administering policy, central government is often more effective when it provides an arena for problem-solving by others. This role is clearly related to partnership, and contrasts sharply with traditional policy and administrative approaches. It involves the systematic organisation of deliberation and information-pooling. In identifying the State's role in facilitating deliberation, information-pooling and action by other organisations, it is not implied that the State is neutral, or that it comes to issues without an agenda or interests of its own. The State is much more than a referee. Its democratic mandate and resources give it a unique role in the partnership process. This empowers it to shape the agenda and pursue its own goals; it also constrains it, given its dependence on others for resources and political legitimacy.
- 4.56 Another emerging role of central government would seem to be protection of non-statutory organisations. An aspect of the exciting policy change of the past decade has been the move from establishing statutory bodies, with a permanent and guaranteed life, to the use of ad hoc, or task-oriented, bodies. These seem more flexible and innovative, but are also more vulnerable. Consequently, central government seems to have a role in protecting them in their relations with statutory bodies and large, heavily-resourced, State agencies. It is too early to say whether the use of non-statutory bodies is a temporary phenomenon. It may be

that they should, and will, be absorbed into mainstream national and local government. This is one of the larger questions concerning Irish partnership and policy, which cannot be addressed here, but which requires discussion.

4.57 The final new role listed, is the support of interest group formation. Central government has the legitimacy and resources to support the formation and development of interest groups. The willingness to do this reflects the belief, noted in Section IV (i), that the inclusiveness and quality of relationships in society is both a good in itself and is productive. In the partnership process, the State sometimes shares some of its authority with social partners; which, of course, involves them in sharing some of its responsibility. In supporting interest groups, it is legitimate for the State to assign certain tasks and favour high standards of openness, democracy, representation and *direct participation*.

4.58 National-level partnership arrangements cannot be effective if they are premised on an outdated view of the power, autonomy and effectiveness of central government. They will not assist in solving problems if they rely on central government to design, direct and administer programmes. Partnership will not retain its relevance if it relies on the State to underwrite the partners' monopoly of representation of groups of citizens. That legitimacy must be created and recreated in action. The first major challenge, then, is how to refocus partnership arrangements so that they are consistent with the emerging roles of national government. A second challenge is how to redesign public administration itself, so that it is consistent with these emerging roles.

(iv) Combining Policy-Making, Implementation and Monitoring

4.59 The final element of a new vision of partnership, concerns the links between policy-making, implementation and monitoring. The presentation of this idea must proceed in two steps. The first is an outline of why a focus on policy-making must now be balanced by an equal focus on implementation and monitoring. This is an important idea, but one to which there are some objections. The second step is to suggest that the objections have some validity. Consequently, it is argued that we need not only to link policy-making, implementation and monitoring, but to rethink them. When we do that, there may no longer be separate spheres of *policy-making, implementation and monitoring*, in the conventional sense.

Focusing Partnership on Implementation and Monitoring

4.60 Why must implementation and monitoring now be given equal weight with policy-making? The answer is in the arguments already advanced. In Section III (iii), we noted that an emphasis on consensus per se, could allow us forget that change only occurs through the mobilisation of people. Policy-making in itself does not mobilise people. In Section III (v), we recorded the widespread feeling that there is a problem in linking national representation to local action. In Section III (vi), we noted the frustration arising from the limited effectiveness in achieving real change. In Section III (vii), we noted the drain on resources which arises from the proliferation of partnership bodies, the distinct roles of which were not clear, or not adhered to. In Section III (viii), we listed a weakness of

monitoring as one of the problems in existing partnership arrangements. Section IV (ii) set out a new view of what a social partner is now, emphasising action, information and dialogue, rather than representation, brokering and control. Finally, the declining ability of central government to address economic and social problems by designing, funding, administering and checking major public programmes, was discussed in Section IV(iii).

1.61 Taken together, these points suggest that national-level partnership, which focused on national-level *policy-making*, is unlikely to solve the complex and diverse problems which Irish people confront. Agreement on a strategic approach, and even on specific policies, means little if these are not implemented effectively. If they cannot be implemented in accord with a central design, then they have to be implemented with local or sectoral discretion. That means little, if we have no way of telling which versions work and which versions fail. In many areas of welfare policy, social policy, labour market policy and industrial policy, implementation and monitoring are now the crucial requirements. How are they to be met? The reform of the public system through the Strategic Management Initiative and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy is part of the answer. A social partnership system which engages more actively with implementation and monitoring is another part.

Policy-Design: Combining Policy-Making, Implementation and Monitoring

4.62 The idea of engaging social partnership organisations on implementation and monitoring has been questioned by some participants in the discussion of a *Framework for Partnership*. The reluctance arises from a sense that implementation and monitoring are technocratic activities, which absorb large amounts of effort. The devotion of very scarce human resources to these activities would distract organisations from considerations of policy, in fields where social distress is acute and the very aims and methods of current policy are felt to be quite inadequate. This view reflects a fear that the opportunity to *change* policy might be sacrificed, in return only for entanglement in a paper chase. The new focus on implementation and monitoring would, despite the best of intentions, amount to relegation from the premier division.

1.63 These reservations, and the instinct they reflect, have some validity. In contrast to *strategy*, *policy-making* and *decision-making* as traditionally understood, *implementation* and *monitoring* are certainly technocratic activities. Old-style implementation deploys fixed instruments to pursue goals laid down by policy makers. Old-style monitoring records these activities and measures success against these same goals. It would certainly be a mistake for organisations that have achieved a place in national partnership to be mired in these activities - especially when they feel that the very goals and methods of policy need to be recast.

4.64 Consequently, this suspicion and reluctance have some basis. They should, however, be taken in conjunction with the other arguments developed above. When we do that, we find that it is no longer possible to link policy-making, implementation and monitoring, when these are understood in their old sense. Policy-makers cannot specify the goals and methods of policy in ways which cover the complexity and diversity of problems. Administrative

departments cannot devise systems complex and flexible enough to meet the variety of needs and demands. Monitors, whether civil servants or social partners sitting in the quarterly Partnership 2000 monitoring meeting, cannot hope to view what is really happening, or failing to happen. While these arguments might, at first sight, be considered to reinforce the resistance to an enhanced focus on implementation and monitoring, the opposite is the case. These arguments undermine the clear distinction between policy-making, implementation and monitoring, upon which that resistance is based. In that sense, monitoring may not be an ideal word for what is required.

- 4.65 What is required is examination of the practical successes and failures of policy, which is used to revise both the methods and *goals* of policy. This means that monitoring becomes part of implementation, and both are the basis for policy revision (i.e. policy-making). It is hard to find the right language to describe this. It is hard to find the right institutional arrangements to make it possible. Yet, it is happening already, to an extent, and many social partnership organisations, departments and agencies have some practical experience of it.
- 4.66 To describe it, we might note that the difficulty of making, implementing and monitoring policy, to address problems which are complex and diverse, has parallels in other activities. Recent changes in business are said to be undermining the separation between *conception* and *execution*, which characterised traditional management and production. A variety of factors are pushing firms to allow more thought and redesign in what used to be routine jobs. Simultaneously, they have to bring more operational and monitoring activities into the planning process. This involves them adjusting the means to the ends, but also adjusting the ends, where that is necessary. This is the sense in which it is proposed, above, that implementation and monitoring must now be given equal weight with policy-making. The term *policy-design* may describe the process which is proposed. In complex policy areas, the national partnership agreement usually provides only a shared commitment to action, and guidelines for the approach to be adopted. Policy-design is still necessary: identifying who are the best people to involve, what initial methods should be adopted, mobilising the relevant people and agencies, reviewing the effects, and revising both goals and methods in the light of these findings. Allowing for the inadequacy of the word, it can be said that in many policy areas, monitoring is now the essence of policy development. The term policy-design is one way of describing this fusion of policy-making, implementation and monitoring.
- 4.67 If it is difficult to describe, it is also difficult to find the institutional arrangements to make this happen. It seems beyond dispute that social partners have a central role to play. They should be able to identify and mobilise the appropriate people to involve. Social partnership institutions seem the obvious place to organise and co-ordinate the practical deliberation which these people must then engage in. But the problems outlined in Section III, show that most, if not all, social partners have a problem in precisely this area: linking national representation to local action. Consequently, a key task of a new *Framework for Partnership* is to assist them to address this problem.

4.68 When they do address it, they will, however, face another problem: the public system is not organised in a way that easily allows a fusion of policy-making, implementation and monitoring. Consequently, the reorganisation of the public system, through the SMI and NAPS, is a necessary complement to new partnership arrangements. Such a fusion, requires that service providers develop their ability to work closely with citizens. It requires that Government Ministers and national Departments allow - indeed, oblige - providers and social partners to undertake policy-design, in the sense outlined above. It requires also that national policy is itself revised in the light of the learning which emerges from the policy-design process.

Section V

Options for a More Inclusive and Effective Partnership Approach

Options for a More Inclusive and Effective Partnership Approach

(i) Problems and Perspectives

The Urgency of Change

5.1 Section III identified seven problems which arise in current national partnership arrangements:

- The limits of consensus
- The limited terms of inclusion
- The difficulty of linking national representation and/or policy formation to local action
- Effectiveness in achieving real change
- Proliferation of partnership bodies
- Problems of monitoring
- The relationship between social partnership and representative democracy

5.2 An important argument is that many of these problems - particularly the problems of linking to the local level, limited effectiveness and proliferation - are experienced by all social partners. Furthermore, these problems are serious enough and diverse enough to warrant significant change in national partnership arrangements. As one contributor, with wide experience of national partnership, put it: *"the status quo will collapse under the weight of paper, procedure, meetings and repetitive discussion"*.

Elements of a Renewed Vision of Social Partnership

5.3 Section IV identified three trends which throw light on these problems, and allow a renewed vision of social partnership:

- The nature and role of social partners is changing, in ways which accentuate mobilisation, information and action
- The roles of national government are changing, in ways that weaken traditional policy-making and administration, and accentuate its role as policy entrepreneur and facilitator of information-pooling and deliberation
- The relationship between policy-making, implementation and monitoring is changing, in ways which place monitoring, of a new sort, at the centre of policy development, and requires a new combination of all three

5.4 The Forum believes that these describe a challenging new context for social partnership. Exploration of these trends, and reflection on the experience of social partnership, has led the Forum to a number of principles which inform its proposals for change.

Emerging Collaboration Between Social Partners is a Model

5.5 Various social partner organisations have begun to get together to solve problems. Examples include work between ICTU and Womens' Aid on domestic violence, between the INOU and ICTU on long-term unemployment, between IBEC and ICTU on training and between ICTU, IBEC and the Community Platform against racism in the workplace. This emerging collaboration between social partners is a significant model for what might be achieved via a renewed framework for partnership.

The Policy Process as a Circle

5.6 The policy process should be seen as a continuous circle involving policy-making, implementation and monitoring. There should be no sense of hierarchy in approach to these three. Indeed, if anything, implementation and monitoring are more important, since they are not adequately handled at present.

We Require Both Strategic Focus and Self-transformative Participation

5.7 Strategic focus is necessary because different parties must be working from a shared understanding of the priority areas of action and the main policy approaches to be adopted in those priority areas. Where there is a *failure* to act on or adopt a particular idea, this can usually be traced to one of two things: the system has insufficient strategic focus, or there is, in fact, no real agreement on what that focus should be. Consequently, the development of the partnership system requires:

- that more parts of the system acquire the ability to set strategic priorities; and
- that we deepen and widen the shared understanding (particularly on social exclusion), that informs a strategic focus.

5.8 All of that could be achieved, but still leave us with poor results on many fronts, such as social exclusion, training and enterprise-level partnership. The reason is that even a strategic focus, based on a shared understanding between the social partners at national level, is not enough in policy areas characterised by complexity and diversity. There is agreement that something additional is required: new levels of participation which enable the recipients of policy to judge what works, and new policy systems which feed that back into the shared understanding and the strategic focus.

The Co-evolution of Partnership Bodies and Partnership Organisations

5.9 In considering a new framework for partnership there is a tendency to oscillate between discussing the partnership institutions or bodies (NESC, NESF etc.) and the partnership organisations (as listed in Box 3 of Section II). All are agreed that the two are mutually determining. Consequently, there is no purpose in seeking the perfect design of national partnership institutions and arrangements. The only way to proceed is to adopt some provisional re-design of the partnership institutions, and to choose projects which will both develop the partners and throw light on how the institutions might then be changed further.

widening could push the numbers on the Council above a level at which effective deliberation on strategic issues is possible. In order to avoid this, the number of members nominated by existing organisations should be reduced.

Closer institutional relations between NESC and NESF

5.16 There should be much closer institutional links between NESC and NESF. Three reasons can be advanced for this:

- (i) to improve and link the agenda-setting of both organisations;
- (ii) to get each body to focus on distinct parts of the policy-loop (policy-making, implementation and monitoring); and
- (iii) to ensure that each body has access to the skills it needs.

Various models for the link between NESC and NESF could be proposed. Three generic models seem to emerge:

- (i) creation of a single institution;
- (ii) creation of an over-arching body of which NESF and NESC would be components; or
- (iii) inter-institutional agreement, sponsored by government.

5.17 A case could be made for creation of a single institution which would do both strategic deliberation (the main NESC role) and team-based exploration of implementation and monitoring (the primary activity proposed for NESF - see below). As regards agenda-setting, this might be viewed as the best way to ensure that these activities are undertaken to a single, coherent, agenda. It could also be seen as most likely to achieve a focus on distinct parts of the policy loop, since separate organisations might always be tempted back to strategic analysis and report writing. A single institution could be one way to ensure that each organisation (or activity) has access to the resources it needs, since there is a strong case for providing NESF with enhanced secretariat resources.

5.18 However, there are also reasons to stop short of a single organisation in the re-design of the partnership arrangements which the Forum believes is necessary. In considering agenda-setting, note should be made of the fact that NESF has a particular focus on social exclusion. There seems no reason to change this, and no reason, in principle, why it could not be accommodated in any of the three generic models. Nevertheless, given the demands on partners, a focus on exclusion may be better maintained by continuing to have both a Forum and a Council. As regards achieving a focus on distinct parts of the policy loop, there may also be advantages to having both a Forum and a Council. While separate institutions might be tempted back to strategic analysis and report writing, the widening of NESC should weaken this tendency. Indeed, a single body might be dominated by the strategic focus, and might always relegate team-based exploration of implementation and monitoring to a secondary role. This is especially likely, given that team-based work on implementation and monitoring is relatively unfamiliar and difficult.

5.10 The task of a new *Framework for Partnership* is to find institutional arrangements which do two things:

- assist each organisation individually, and all organisations collectively, to address their common problems; and
- move the overall system in the direction of the three trends summarised above.

5.11 The challenge is to find our way to a new pattern of organisation in which central action and central co-ordination are linked, in ways which feed experiments into the wider system, and in which national policies are reshaped in the light of local or sectoral experiments.

5.12 In finding practical ways to move in this direction, three questions are helpful:

- What is the task of partnership in any sphere?
- Who should be involved?
- What procedures are used for agenda-setting and analysis?

In developing its proposals the Forum has kept these questions in mind.

(ii) Proposed New Arrangements

5.13 The discussion of a Framework for Partnership has led the Forum to identify possible new arrangements for national-level partnership. Here we list the set of possible changes, before discussing them in detail:

- further widening of the membership of NESC;
- closer institutional relations between NESC and NESF;
- NESF projects to be undertaken by teams;
- closer and more continuous involvement of civil servants in the NESF;
- involvement of both NESF and NESC in monitoring; and
- involvement of both NESC and NESF in the SMI and the NAPS.

5.14 While some of these changes would be straightforward, others raise issues which require careful consideration. In the event of a positive reaction in principle by the Government on these proposals, it would be particularly important that there should be full consultation with all the parties and organisations involved and their views taken into account before final decisions are taken on the detailed arrangements in relation to issues such as future institutional structures, functions and composition.

Further widening of the membership of NESC

5.15 Consideration should be given to widening the membership of NESC, to reflect more fully the range of organisations in the community and voluntary sector. It was shown in Section III that the partial and unsatisfactory terms of inclusion underlies many of the problems in the existing arrangements. Consequently, a further widening of NESC could be seen as a precondition for a more effective and inclusive partnership system. On its own, further

- 5.19 This is relevant also to the third motivation for closer links between NESF and NESC: the need to ensure that each has access to adequate skills. While there is a case for giving NESF access to enhanced secretariat resources, this does not necessitate creation of a single institution (see below). A further qualification to the argument for a single institution arises when we consider the composition of the Forum and the Council. The participation of Oireachtas Members in the Forum has no equivalent in the Council, and the discussion of a Framework for Partnership revealed little case for a change in existing arrangements in this regard. On balance, the Forum does not believe that the current re-design of national partnership arrangements should move to a single Forum/Council.
- 5.20 There was some discussion on the merits of creating a joint secretariat. However, it was felt that the most effective way to underpin and support the Forum's and the Council's focus on distinct parts of the policy loop would be to maintain the separate secretariats. In this regard, it was underlined that the existing Liaison Committee (comprising representatives of the Department of the Taoiseach, NESF and NESC) should more actively pursue co-ordination and cohesion on a structured basis between the two institutions.
- 5.21 It was proposed that recruitment to the NESF Secretariat should not be limited to civil servants but should be opened up to public competition. However, the primary future activity of the Forum, team-based exploration of implementation and monitoring, needs more than conventional secretariat resources, of either the analytical or administrative kind.
- 5.22 The new arrangements must achieve the three goals discussed above: linked agenda-setting, a focus on distinct parts of the policy loop and access to the right resources. The last of these reflects the proposal that the Forum undertake its projects through a new kind of team-working. We now turn to this critical idea.

NESF Projects to be undertaken by Teams

- 5.23 Perhaps the most important proposed change in the partnership arrangements is the achievement of a new balance between policy-making, implementation and monitoring. To this end, once agendas and work programmes have been discussed and agreed, the NESF would undertake its projects mainly through teams. These teams would be drawn from the social partner organisations on NESF, and would be put together and resourced to undertake *policy-design* in specific policy areas.¹⁸ They would involve the local and/or specialised elements of the national organisations. This proposal is designed to address the problems discussed in Section III, and move with the trends outlined in Section IV (and summarised above).
- 5.24 It should be emphasised that, in general, this would be separate and distinct from the quarterly monitoring process under Partnership 2000 which relates largely to monitoring the implementation of specific commitments in the Programme. The Forum teams would, however, be concerned with (i) evaluating the effectiveness of policy; (ii) aiming to facilitate

18 See the definition and discussion of policy-design in Section IV (iv).

corrective action and/or timely change in inappropriate policies; and (iii) improving policy-making by informing and reshaping strategic policy analysis. However, where the existing Partnership 2000 monitoring arrangements have initiated task-oriented teams, the relationship between these and the NESF teams will need to be clearly defined.

5.25 This proposal reflects the central analysis in this Report. The core idea is that a NESF project would be undertaken by a team, put together for a specific purpose. The national-level organisations would reach down into their organisations to identify the people most suited for an in-depth exploration of policy implementation and monitoring in a particular policy or geographic area. In some cases, this might involve the team, or the Forum, conducting hearings in a local area on a particular issue. Each team would have a finite life. There would be a small number of projects at any one time (perhaps 2 or 3). Several questions naturally arise concerning:

- the composition of the teams;
- the nature of the NESF to which the teams report;
- support systems for the teams; and
- management processes within and between teams.

5.26 In answering these questions, it may be helpful to draw on expertise in public sector management and/or private sector team-building.

5.27 As regards the composition of teams, one suggestion is that teams should only contain people who have a definite relevance to, and experience of, the subject under investigation. This reflects the underlying logic of team-working, as it has emerged in business. There, *new rules of assembly* and conditions for participation have emerged: relevant expertise and experience becomes the basis for participation in a team. These replace *role, position and representation*, which determined membership of committees in the old system of organisation. The specific logic of the new approach was expressed by several speakers in the Forum's discussions. This will challenge organisations to review their internal structures and relationships. Teams made up of only those with something real to contribute, would avoid the kind of lowest-common-denominator report writing which is a constant danger. It would eliminate participants who have limited real engagement with the issue under investigation, but who simply attend every meeting in order to add a reference to their own particular interest group at the final stage of drafting.

5.28 While the logic of team-working seems to indicate narrow membership, several qualifications have arisen. First, attention has been drawn to the benefits of ongoing interaction between social partners. This observation is potentially important, and is reflected in analytical studies of co-operation, which emphasise repeated interaction as one factor which supports co-operative behaviour. Indeed, this view could lead some to reject the whole idea of temporary teams made up of people other than the national officers of partnership organisations. However, that objection neglects the fact that NESF, the Forum and Partnership 2000 will provide a widened arena for ongoing interaction between national

partnership organisations. A second, related, argument arises from the fear that highly selective teams might allow some social partners to walk away from social exclusion or issues of inequality, opting for participation in a team on purely economic matters.

- 5.29 A balance has to be found between these concerns. The appointment of a project leader and project secretary offer some opportunity to address the anxieties about narrow teams discussed above. The Forum believes that in balancing these concerns, priority should be given to establishing a new, team-based, method of working and to tapping into the range of local action and experimentation.
- 5.30 Consideration must also be given to the extent to which, and way in which, the teams *report* to the NESF. The logic of team-working is genuine decentralisation and real problem-solving. This would suggest that: (i) the work of a team, however expressed, has a validity deriving from the individual expertise and collective endeavour of the group; and (ii) it would not be correct to have the work of teams always vetted and validated by the Forum. This could allow traditional haggling over the findings, and sophisticated log-rolling by the national officers of each organisation. In some cases, reporting back may not arise, since the team would fix the problem, by undertaking joint action.
- 5.31 Nevertheless, the relation between the Forum and its team-based projects must be defined. The aim of the new design is two-fold: to achieve a greater focus on implementation/monitoring and to generalise the discoveries which emerge. Where the discovery of a team suggests that either the goals or methods of policy require to be changed, then the Forum will become a key institution. It could be the institution into which a range of team findings are fed. Where several teams are exploring different approaches, the Forum could have a key role in monitoring their progress and comparing their achievements. It should be an arena for the identification and dissemination of best practice. In these activities, its impact will, as before, depend on the quality of its deliberation, reason-giving and analysis. In addition, the Forum should set the agenda on which teams will work and identify the appropriate members of the social partner organisations to be on the teams.
- 5.32 Attention must also be given to support systems for the teams and, more widely, for the Forum and Council. Three general types of skill seem to be required:
- the first are analytical skills, necessary for formulating strategic economic and social policies that command agreement and for diagnosing specific problems of implementation and action;
 - the second is organisational and administrative skill, necessary to manage the ongoing activity of the Forum and the Council; and
 - the third is the skill necessary for successful team-working.
- 5.33 Studies of team-working in business suggest that these are significant requirements. The move to the project approach and team-working was accompanied by changes in

management structure and behaviour, and the emergence of new roles for the centre. In some cases, these include the creation of new *area leaders*, *local leaders* and an executive committee designed to assist networking and communication between autonomous teams. In addition, *project sponsors* and *project leaders* are seen as key players in linking teams to the wider organisation. This suggests that NESF teams may need support of a kind not yet provided by any national partnership body. Care must be taken to ensure that this third type of skill is developed or accessed. Project leaders need not come from the joint or separate secretariat. Individuals may be seconded from other agencies because of their expertise in particular policy areas and team-leadership skills.

5.34 Finally, the above proposals on the Forum's functions and role would necessitate changes in its constitution and terms-of-reference while its internal structures and working arrangements would also need to be revised.

Closer and more continuous involvement of civil servants in the NESF

5.35 Senior civil servants from six government departments (or offices) sit on the NESC. It is agreed that this facilitates the analytical work of the Council and the policy impact of the reports which emerge. The membership of the NESF does not include civil servants. The Forum occasionally invites civil servants to attend its meetings. Members, from all strands, cited the infrequent involvement of civil servants (and agencies) as a problem. Consequently, the Forum proposes that there should be closer and more continuous involvement of civil servants in its deliberations. It believes that this is necessary in order to assist in its work of implementation and monitoring.

Involvement of both NESF and NESC in monitoring

5.36 In Section IV, the policy process was described as a circle or loop, involving strategic orientation, policy-making, implementation and monitoring. While strategic priorities are critical in achieving coherent action, these must be open to revision in the light of experience; experience which comes from implementation and monitoring. Indeed, it was argued that the main weaknesses in Irish policy are now in the phases of implementation and monitoring. To address this requires the Strategic Management Initiative, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and a social partnership system which engages more actively with implementation and monitoring. At the same time, it was argued that to really connect the three phases is to abandon traditional ideas of *policy-making*, *implementation and monitoring*. The term *policy-design* was suggested, to describe the new combination of policy-making, implementation and monitoring which is now necessary. This involves exploration of implementation and use of monitoring to re-work the goals and methods of policy. The Forum should have a key role in this process of policy-design. Consequently, the Forum must also have a major role in monitoring.

5.37 Partnership 2000 specified that the monitoring arrangements would be reviewed in the light of the Forum's Report *A Framework for Partnership*. The recommendation outlined above is one important input to that review. It suggests that existing arrangements may need to be reviewed, as in undertaking its project-based team-work, the Forum will inevitably be

involved in monitoring and benchmarking. Consequently, the monitoring arrangements should not designate benchmarking as solely the role of NESC, and should certainly not permanently assign benchmarking to the NESC, rather than to the NESF.

Involvement of NESC and NESF in the SMI and the NAPS

5.38 Throughout the Forum's discussions, the links between social partnership and the public system were cited as critical to achieving success. The new vision of partnership set out in Section IV, reflects the joint evolution of social partners and the public policy system, the first signs of which are clearly evident. If this co-evolution is to continue, then some way must be found to involve the social partners in the Strategic Management Initiative, where appropriate. Likewise, the social partners should also have a role in the development, implementation and monitoring of the NAPS.



**Terms of Reference
and Constitution of
the Forum**

**List of the Forum's
Publications**

Terms of Reference and Constitution of the Forum

1. The Terms of Reference of the National Economic and Social Forum are to develop economic and social policy initiatives, particularly initiatives to combat unemployment, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus on social and economic matters.
The Forum will:
 - (i) Have a specific focus on:-
 - job creation and obstacles to employment growth;
 - long-term unemployment;
 - disadvantage;
 - equality and social justice in Irish society; and
 - policies and proposals in relation to these issues.
 - (ii) Make practical proposals on measures to meet these challenges;
 - (iii) Examine and make recommendations on other economic and social issues;
 - (iv) Review and monitor the implementation of the Forum's proposals and if necessary make further recommendations; and
 - (v) Examine and make recommendations on matters referred to it by Government.
2. The Forum may consider matters on its own initiative or at the request of Government.
3. The Forum will work in two year cycles and will inform Government of its programme of work within three months of the beginning of each cycle.
4. In drawing up its work programme, the Forum will take account of the role and functions of other bodies in the social and economic area such as NESC to avoid duplication.
5. The Forum may invite Ministers, Public Officials, Members of the Forum, and outside experts to make presentations and to assist the Forum in its work.
6. The Forum will publish and submit all its reports to Government, to the Houses of the Oireachtas and to other Government Departments and bodies as may be appropriate.
7. The Forum will be drawn from three broad strands. The first will represent the Government and the Oireachtas. The second will represent the traditional Social Partners. The third strand will be representative of groups traditionally outside the consultative process including women, the unemployed, the disadvantaged, people with a disability, youth, older people and environmental interests.
8. The Forum will have an independent Chairperson appointed by Government.
9. The term of office of members will be two years during which term members may nominate alternates. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. The size of the membership may be varied by the Government.
10. The Forum is under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and is funded through a Grant-in-Aid.

Forum Publications

(i) Forum Reports

Report No.	Title	Date
1	<i>Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP</i>	November 1993
2	<i>National Development Plan 1994-1999 - the proposed Local Development Programme</i>	November 1993
3	<i>Commission on Social Welfare - Outstanding Recommendations</i>	January 1994
4	<i>Ending Long-term Unemployment</i>	June 1994
5	<i>Income Maintenance Strategies</i>	July 1994
6	<i>Quality Delivery of Social Services</i>	February 1995
7	<i>Jobs Potential of the Services Sector</i>	April 1995
8	<i>First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	May 1995
9	<i>Jobs Potential of Work Sharing</i>	January 1996
10	<i>Equality Proofing Issues</i>	February 1996
11	<i>Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment</i>	January 1997
12	<i>Rural Renewal - Combating Social Exclusion</i>	March 1997
13	<i>Unemployment Statistics</i>	May 1997
14	<i>Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion</i>	October 1997
15	<i>Second Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	November 1997
16	<i>A Framework for Partnership - Enriching Strategic Consensus Through Participation</i>	December 1997

(ii) Forum Opinions

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1	<i>Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment</i>	March 1995
2	<i>National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	January 1996
3	<i>Long-term Unemployment Initiatives</i>	May 1996
4	<i>Post-PCW Negotiations - A New Deal?</i>	August 1996
5	<i>Employment Equality Bill</i>	December 1996
6	<i>Pensions Policy Issues</i>	October 1997

(iii) Forum Opinions under the Monitoring Procedures of *Partnership 2000*

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1	<i>Development of the Equality Provisions</i>	November 1997
2	<i>Targeted Employment and Training Measures</i>	November 1997

