



## Regional Development Agencies and Social Regeneration



### INTRODUCTION

Urban Forum is concerned that community and voluntary groups could lose out as the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) comes to an end over the next few years, by diminishing the capacity to engage in regeneration and renewal at all levels from neighbourhood to national.

The crucial role of the community and voluntary sector in regeneration and renewal is stressed in the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and the Urban White Paper's vision of renaissance in towns and cities.

The impact of the winding-down of the SRB on the voluntary and community sector is being monitored by Urban Forum with funding from Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Special Grants Programme.

Urban Forum held a national seminar on Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Social Regeneration in Birmingham on 31 July 2002.

The seminar brought together 43 delegates from community and voluntary organisations (CVOs), RDAs, Government Offices and Central Government Departments (Department of Trade and Industry and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).

Further to the introduction of the RDA 'Single Pot' in April 2002 to replace Single Regeneration Budget and other RDA programmes, the seminar focused upon the future role of RDAs in social regeneration and capacity building.

33% of the 43 delegates returned completed evaluation forms, showing a high level of satisfaction with the event.

Delegates particularly valued the diversity of presentations and participants.

85% of responses requested future events on RDA links to CVOs and LSPs.

# Questions for RDAs

The key question for the day was:

**What is the RDA role in supporting community and voluntary organisations and community capacity building as SRB is wound down?**

## The following issues were also discussed:

1. The relationship between RDAs and Local Strategic Partnerships

What is the RDA role in : -

- helping set local strategies
- funding local initiatives
- working with LSPs?

2. How can mainstream economic development and physical regeneration contribute to inclusive and sustainable regeneration?

3. How far do RDA national targets measure RDA commitment to social regeneration? Is there a need for additional and/or different targets?

4. Is there an economic or business case for RDAs to support social inclusion activity?

5. How do RDAs share good practice in social regeneration, both between themselves and with the community and voluntary sector?

6. What will be the impact of the new Regions White Paper on RDAs?

The rest of this report sets out the key findings from the day. A number of recommendations, to be taken forward by Urban Forum, are set out at the end of the report.

The day included two workshop sessions and presentations by the following speakers:

**Andrew Attfield**  
O-Regen  
Development  
Trust

**William Arnold**  
Department of  
Trade & Industry

**Caroline Simpson**  
Advantage West  
Midlands

**Sharon Palmer**  
Regional Action  
West Midlands

**Krista Blair**  
Engage East  
Midlands

Each speaker's presentation is available from Urban Forum.

# WHAT DID WE FIND?

## The role of RDAs in the wind-down of SRB

- Several issues were raised in relation to the role of RDAs in supporting the community and voluntary sector with the wind-down of SRB. These focused on funding and strategy.
- Generally, concerns were raised about core funding for CVOs post-SRB. CVOs need to find ways of influencing RDA strategies to ensure that the sector does not lose out on the funds that **are** available. Some RDAs are being proactive and looking at new ways of funding CVOs after SRB is wound-up. For example, SEEDA are working with partners to develop successor schemes to SRB.
- RDAs also have an important strategic role as a 'broker' (with an ability to bend mainstream funding). To achieve this, RDAs need to work with other organisations and agencies in the region. Infrastructure groups have an important role to play in making links between CVOs and RDAs.

## Role of DTI

- The DTI needs to give RDAs a stronger lead and more scope for tackling social regeneration. Currently it is difficult for RDAs to justify investments that are not measured by the targets (what gets measured gets done).
- According to the DTI the divide between social and economic is a false dichotomy. It is acknowledged that there are many social activities that contribute to the economy.
- The suggestion was made that volunteering could be included as an output.

## RDA Targets

- Two tiers of targets are designed so RDAs are not limited to outcomes that they can deliver. Tier 2 targets are those that the RDA can cause to be delivered. The London Development Agency provides a good example of additional tier 2 targets around equality and inclusion.
- There is a need to promote RDA understanding of the economic value of CVOs and how the CV sector contributes to targets.
- Targets could include a minimum number of meetings between RDAs and CV sector networks & BME networks in order to promote strategic dialogue. The CV sector should be included in developing targets at an early stage.
- RDAs should examine, and be aware of, areas missed by the targets. Also, RDAs should ensure that targets do not have a negative effect and increase the poverty gap.
- There is a need for RDAs to carry out more imaginative monitoring & evaluation e.g. on capacity building projects.

## Information exchange/learning

- The relationship between RDAs and CVOs is often difficult, with language barriers and culture differences. In addition, those in authority in RDAs do not always have a good understanding of the CV sector.
- RDAs need to be more accessible to CVOs. Systems should be 'CV sector friendly' and acknowledge barriers that exist to involvement. There must **not** be a dependence on certain individuals within RDAs to have links with the CV sector – this must be embedded in RDA business strategies.
- To achieve this, information needs to flow both ways (possibly via a national RDA best practice group involving the CV sector) and all sectors need capacity building. **Note:** *cross-RDA networks exist to allow for information sharing on topical areas (eg social inclusion). The networks are exclusive to RDAs.*
- Both good and bad practice should be shared, although the dangers in comparing one region to another should be recognised.

- Strategic decisions must be based on local intelligence. Observatories should provide data for the region.

## Business Case

- A business case could be developed for social regeneration (e.g. lack of cost on public purse).
- RDAs must encompass and support community development and not just social enterprise. Social enterprise is not a universal solution, and can undermine public services. There is a need to find a way of measuring the value of social projects to the economy.
- RDAs could consider merging their growth and inclusion strategies.

## RDA/LSP relationship

- LSPs link local to regional and are crucial to the regional delivery agenda. However, it must be acknowledged that LSPs have a lot of ground to cover in a short time, and that there is a real danger that they could become overloaded.
- If RDAs were to fund some core costs of CVOs long term this could allow for capacity building and engagement in LSPs in a meaningful way.

## Diversity

- One model doesn't work for all. For example, differences between rural and urban areas must be recognised.

## Regions White Paper

- The White Paper will impact on RDAs by providing an increased scrutiny role for Assemblies. Questions exist around how elected bodies will fulfil their scrutiny role.

# NEXT STEPS

## to be taken forward by Urban Forum

- **Publicise the work that is taking place**

Interesting examples of RDA work in relation to CVOs and social regeneration should be gathered from around the country and publicised.

- **Government**

DTI to be asked to provide a stronger lead to give RDAs more scope to tackle social regeneration.

- **Targets**

Lobby Government to ensure that RDA targets include social regeneration and inclusion indicators. Press for CVO inclusion in developing targets at an early stage.

- **Follow-up seminar**

A further seminar to be arranged, with an emphasis on the links between RDAs and LSPs.

- **Best Practice Group**

Explore the possibility of setting up a national best practice group to bring together CVOs and RDAs. The Group would seek to increase understanding and communication between RDAs and CVOs, and ensure that CVOs are able to influence the work of RDAs.

### Urban Forum

70 Cowcross Street

London EC1M 6EJ

tel 020 7253 4716

fax 020 7253 4817

email [info@urbanforum.org.uk](mailto:info@urbanforum.org.uk)

web [www.urbanforum.org.uk](http://www.urbanforum.org.uk)



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Urban Forum welcomes members from all sectors, organisations or individuals interested in urban regeneration and social inclusion.