Social Inclusion Initiative

Social inclusion, participation and empowerment

Address to Australian Council of Social Services National Congress
28 November 2002
Monsignor David Cappo, Chair, Social Inclusion Board
Social inclusion, participation and empowerment

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today about the Social Inclusion Initiative in South Australia.

The South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative is informed by similar initiatives overseas especially the Social Exclusion Unit in the United Kingdom.

Social exclusion is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into community.

The concept of social exclusion then helps us see the multi dimensional aspects of inequality.

It is about recognising that the fight against poverty is both an employment agenda; an income support agenda AND a structured policy response to the multi dimensions of exclusion and their causes.

So what is social inclusion?

A socially inclusive society is a society where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity.

To achieve social inclusion, issues such as poor health, increasing crime rates, increasing problem drug use, poverty and decreased social cohesion must be addressed in an interrelated manner.

As a policy response then, social inclusion has three key elements

- It is informed by a diversity of views.
- It assumes that to ameliorate difficult social problems, multiple solutions are required and
- It focuses on the most vulnerable and/ or disadvantaged.

To bring this about a nine member Board with broad community representation has been established of which I am the Chair.

And with a Unit of 9 core staff located in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The Social Inclusion Unit reports to the Board on a monthly basis and the Chair of the Social Inclusion Board reports regularly to the Premier.

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We are currently working on three issues referred to us by government:

- reducing homelessness
- raising school retention rates particularly in disadvantaged schools and
- developing the Government’s response to the recommendations of the Drugs Summit, held earlier this year in June.

Youth suicide and Aboriginal health issues are future references we may be given and are clearly linked with the existing three references.

Our task is to develop, for the consideration of Government, detailed action plans by early 2003 with targets, strategies and performance measures to deal with each of these three issues.

A key plank in the Social Inclusion Initiative is the need for ‘joined up’ service delivery to respond to the multi causes and effects of social problems that I have just mentioned. This is to ensure that services involving more than one agency are coordinated and integrated around the needs of the individual citizen in the context of his or her family and community.

Problems like substance abuse, unemployment or homelessness are not agency specific.

They require innovative, whole of government joined up programs in partnership with the community. In this, silo based government has become part of the problem rather than the solution. This is because in isolation, State Government departments are disempowered: they feel helpless in tackling these seemingly intractable problems. By joining up, State Government departments can become empowered to act – they are able to take action to address the real issues.

So a new model of joined up government is being developed that will have enormous consequences for the operation of government in South Australia: what I call governance issues. We need to look at accountability, incentives and funding structures to ensure that joined up working is a viable and lasting solution to our most pressing social problems.

We are finding that the joined up approach to policy development and service delivery has implications for the way funding is allocated. In terms of the Budget process where decisions are made about funding, we need to move beyond the traditional bi lateral process to a multi agency process.

For the first time in South Australia the 2003 Budget process will include comprehensive multi lateral funding processes in designated key areas of government activity which are best suited to joined up solutions.
Treasury and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet are currently looking at various funding models such as pooled budgets and associated accountability mechanisms to support this evolving multi lateral resource allocation model.

I want to stress that we are still at the stage of developing action plans for the consideration of Government in relation to the three social problems which have been referred to us:

- school retention
- illicit drugs and
- homelessness.

The policy work we have undertaken to date has been based around extensive community consultations and policy analysis across the South Australian public sector. Progressively, from later this year, following these community consultations, we will be in a position to announce comprehensive plans and programs as responses to these multi layered social problems. Because the plans are still in preparation and yet to be considered by Government, I cannot say a lot about the content of the action plans except to describe in broad terms the policy frameworks and processes underpinning them.

I want to focus today on this policy work because these processes are directly relevant to our theme of inclusiveness, participation and empowerment.

The policy work we have been undertaking in each of our references has four key processes:

1. Seeking out a diversity of views both in the community and in government
2. Fostering the participation of key stakeholders and securing their goodwill and building their support
3. Sharing information among stakeholders by:
   - Identifying Australian and international research on the issues and
   - Building the evidence base about what works.
4. Gaining the commitment of the most senior members of Government – Ministers and Chief Executives.

Of our three references, the one closest to being finalized and the one I want to focus on here is the development of the Government response to the Drugs Summit Recommendations. The Drugs Summit exemplifies a model for consultation and community participation in policy development that we in South Australia are very proud of because of its inclusiveness and its emphasis on broad community participation and empowerment.

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The focus of the Drugs Summit was on illicit drug use, including the growing use of amphetamine-type drugs, including ‘designer drugs’ and broad substance abuse issues in relation to young people and Aboriginal people.

The Drugs Summit provided a unique opportunity for the South Australian community to work together in a bipartisan forum to consider new and innovative ways to map out a future course of action that can really tackle drugs problems in South Australia. Through participation in the Drugs Summit processes the community was empowered: it set the agenda for future policy action in South Australia.

Let me take you through this process according to the four key policy processes I cited earlier:

- Seeking diversity of views
- Fostering participation of key stakeholders
- Sharing information
- Gaining the commitment of Ministers and Chief Executives

**Seeking Diversity of Views**

Extensive community consultations were held prior to the drugs summit to identify community concerns and themes for further exploration through the summit. Twenty four consultations were held across the state with over 900 people participating. These consultations were coordinated by the Drug Action Teams, an existing network throughout South Australia of locally based partnerships between police, other government and non-government agencies and community members. A call was also made for written submissions which resulted in 60 individuals and organizations making submissions on the key themes of the summit.

**Fostering Participation of Key Stakeholders**

The Summit, chaired by the Premier, was conducted over five days in June. Using the themes emerging from the early round of community consultations, the Premier extended invitations to about 180 delegates from a broad range of backgrounds. Included amongst the summit delegates were representatives from Aboriginal communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and non government service providers as well as young people, drug users and their families, politicians and representatives from key government departments involved in drug policy issues.

The public was invited to attend and a special area was set aside to enable them to follow proceedings and to provide input into the development of the strategies and proposals to put directly to Government.
Sharing of Information

A number of discussion papers were prepared based on the research literature and the outcomes of the community consultations. This information about the nature and extent of the drug problem in South Australia was provided to Summit delegates to assist them in their deliberations.

The summit was structured to offer an up to date and comprehensive examination of all key issues. This involved a mix of formal presentations from practitioners, academics and other experts; the relaying of personal experiences; opportunities to ask questions; and the opportunity to make comments during each of the plenary sessions on policies, strategies and proposals to deal with the problems of illicit drugs.

Summit delegates were grouped into 9 working groups covering a range of thematic issues such as school based drug education and intervention, breaking the nexus between drugs and crime and young people and drug use.

During the summit, each of these thematic working groups was charged with the task of developing a set of recommendations about future courses of action to be considered by Government. The recommendations about future actions and strategies were developed by the working groups as part of an ongoing daily process throughout the summit. This was done using a workshop approach involving all summit participants including the public.

So you can see that an important characteristic of the Summit’s structure was its inclusive nature both in terms of content, participation and process.

What about empowerment?

Empowerment results from members of the community feeling that their views, having been invited, are listened to and that they have a feeling of control of the agenda. I believe that these conditions were met in respect of the Drug Summit.

The consultative processes we have adopted in the other two references to the Social Inclusion Board (on school retention and homelessness) are similarly constructed in that they seek a diversity of views, information is shared, key stakeholders are participating and their views expressed are being listened to. Only then can our policy development processes be considered inclusive, participatory and empowering.

Gaining the Commitment of Ministers and Chief Executives

I mentioned earlier a fourth strand to our policy work as gaining the commitment of Ministers and Departmental Chief Executives. This is especially vital in the implementation of our action plans for each of our three references.
In this, political will and political authority is the key to the success of the Social Inclusion Initiative, particularly in regard to the joined up governance arrangements I mentioned earlier.

The Premier Mike Rann has been very clear about this. He continually gives the message to Ministers, Ministerial Advisors and to Chief Executives that the Social Inclusion Initiative is the cornerstone of his government in bringing about social justice. He has stated that the performance of Ministers and Chief Executives will be judged on their ability to engage with this initiative.

Accordingly, an Inter Ministerial Committee has been established to assist in the development and implementation of the joined up packages of programs and policies for each of the three references to the Social Inclusion Initiative.

Each Inter Ministerial Committee is chaired by a ‘Champion Minister’. All other ministers with relevant portfolio responsibilities AND their respective Chief Executives are represented on each Committee.

The Inter Ministerial Committees will drive the implementation of the decisions of Government regarding each of the references horizontally across the system.

Each Inter Ministerial Committee will oversight and support the implementation of the action plans in relation to the social inclusion initiative to ensure:

- that funding is available
- responsibility and accountability is in place
- funding and barriers to joined up approaches are resolved and
- evaluation of outcomes.

Consistent with the principles of social inclusion I cited earlier, we need to ensure that in the implementation of the programs arising from our policy work in the Social Inclusion Initiative that there is continuing participation of key stakeholders. We also need to ensure that the resulting programs are enabling and empowering. And lastly, we need to test out whether the actions for implementation are inclusive: that they are going to benefit the most disadvantaged in our society.

I hope you can see from my comments today that we are making every endeavour to achieve these goals of social inclusion, participation and empowerment.