

COMMITMENTS & APPROACHES

For Shared Societies



The Shared Societies Project

**Democratic Leadership
for Dialogue, Diversity &
Social Cohesion**

Building a World Safe for Difference

HIGHLIGHTS

Building shared societies is a multifaceted task; no single policy or practice can overcome division or distrust.

The Commitments and Approaches for Social Cohesion, are grouped in four categories: institutional arrangements, safeguards, service provision and inter-community development. These commitments have been identified as key policy areas which are essential features of a shared society and thus, leaders are asked to make a commitment if they have not already done so. They also can be used as a check list to review those areas in which a state has made progress and those areas in which more work needs to be done.

The Commitments and Approaches, as well as the Declaration for Social Cohesion, were endorsed by the Club of Madrid Members on the Shared Societies Project Working Group on November 21, 2007 and revised on December 2007, July 2008, and June 2009. The current version is a working document.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

- I. Locating responsibility of social cohesion within government structures
- II. Create opportunities for minorities to be consulted

SAFEGUARDS

- III. Monitor structures and policies to ensure they are supportive of social cohesion
- IV. Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual
- V. Deal with economic disadvantages faced by those discriminated against

SERVICE PROVISIONS

- VI. Ensure that physical environments create opportunities for social interaction
- VII. An education system that demonstrates a commitment to a shared society

INTER-COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- VIII. Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society
- IX. Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of diversity
- X. Take steps to reduce tensions and hostility between communities

COMMITMENT I

Locating responsibility to ensure the promotion of social cohesion clearly within government structures.

Suggested options for action:

- Create a government department with a minister within the government.
- Create a unit within a central government department such as the president's or prime minister's office reporting directly to the president or prime minister.
- Create an independent body such as a community relations council to act as link between government and the people and to encourage civil society involvement in enhancing community relations.

COMMITMENT II

Create opportunities for minorities and marginalised groups and communities to be consulted about their needs and their perception of the responsiveness of state and community structures to meet those needs.

Suggested options for action:

- Establish consultative councils on which all identity groups are represented and with the statutory right to be consulted on the impact of government policies
- Encourage identity groups to create representative bodies with which government and other identity groups can dialogue to explore and understand issues and concerns that affect those groups.
- Create systems of community meetings that allow community members to express their views and air their grievances
- Create the statutory duty of public bodies to include representatives of smaller identity groups in their boards and other decision-making bodies.

COMMITMENT III

Ensure that social cohesion is considered in devising governance structures, policy formation and policy implementation and establish procedures and mechanisms to ensure this is achieved and to reconcile divergent positions between sectional interests.

Suggested options for action:

- Enact statutory provisions that require all public bodies to take account of the impact of their policies and decisions on social cohesion
- Create rigorous monitoring and reporting systems to identify policies and activities that will hinder social cohesion and ensure that steps are taken to negate those effects.
- Establish protocols and procedures for carrying out a “social cohesion audit” of proposed policies and initiatives to test their potential for promoting or damaging social cohesion.
- Create a unit within government to ensure that proposed policies where relevant include measures designed to encourage greater social cohesion
- Create neutral, independent bodies to reconcile divergent positions and overcome competing interests through a participatory, consultative process

COMMITMENT IV

Ensure the legal framework protects the rights of the individual and prohibits discrimination based on ethnic, religious, gender or cultural difference.

Suggested options for action:

- Enact as part of the constitution a statutory bill of rights that reflects international norms and instruments.
- Create a human rights commission independent of government to monitor situations of possible human rights abuses
- Create an anti-discrimination unit to monitor possible sources of discrimination and with authority to redress cases of discrimination
- Establish a fair employment body to establish standards and procedures to ensure fair treatment in the workplace, including public services, the military and police which should be models for other employment sectors.
- Introduce programmes of affirmative action that include the equipping of members of groups, disadvantaged and discriminated against, with the skills necessary to function confidently in work and other social and economic contexts.
- Use awareness campaigns and materials to inform citizens about their rights and obligations, including available resources and mechanisms to redress discrimination and human rights abuses.
- Facilitate identity groups to create institutions and structures which are necessary for the individual to be able to exercise those rights, such as language and religious practices, which can only be expressed fully in the context of interaction with others who share that identity.

COMMITMENT V

Take steps to deal with economic disadvantages faced by sections of society who are discriminated against, and ensure equal access to opportunities and resources.

Suggested options for action:

- Establish fair and transparent land redistribution boards to consider whether farmers that need access to land have opportunities to acquire adequate holdings at affordable prices
- Introduce affirmative action schemes to ensure that individuals from groups disadvantaged as a result of discrimination develop the capacities and confidence, and are encouraged, to take advantage of opportunities to initiate business opportunities
- Create a small business development unit to help individuals and groups to initiate small scale enterprises and support them in the initial stages.
- Provide small credit schemes to make credit available to those from disadvantaged and marginalised communities to initiate new or improve existing business enterprises.
- Establish co-operative bodies to enable small scale producers to work together to market their products more effectively and lessen their reliance on external, intermediary buyers.
- Carry out regional audits of local resources, capacities, opportunities and markets to identify potential economic projects.

COMMITMENT VI

Ensure that physical environments create opportunities for, rather than discourage social interaction.

Suggested options for action:

- Work with planners, architects and academics to identify how our physical environment impacts on social cohesion and raise awareness of this knowledge
- Require local authorities and planning bodies to review the existing environment, identifying obstacles to social cohesion and take steps to remove those obstacles or minimise their negative impact.
- Establish a system to review all future planning decisions to ensure that they include features to encourage social cohesion and remove proposals whose execution would be harmful to social cohesion.
- Establish housing policies that encourage mixed communities, including equitable policies in respect to obtaining housing.

COMMITMENT VII

Ensure an education system that offers equal opportunity for developing the knowledge, skills, capacities and networks necessary for children to become productive, engaged members of society and that demonstrates a commitment to a shared society and educates children to understand and respect others.

Suggested options for action:

- Evaluate educational establishments to assess to what extent they give a message of respect for difference and diversity and to what extent they encourage division and prejudice.
- Where schools do not reflect the range of identities in the community, create programmes of exchange between schools to create opportunities for young people to meet and learn about each other.
- Introduce a curriculum on pluralism, diversity and mutual understanding to be implemented in all schools as a full subject, including assessment. This would include developing an understanding of the benefits of social cohesion as a national vision and how individual behaviour can promote or damage good community relations.

COMMITMENT VIII

Initiate a process to encourage the creation of a shared vision of society at local and national level.

Suggested options for action:

- Introduce citizens to materials that encourage them to think about their society and their place in it and the place of other identity groups. Also invite them to consider how they would want to see society in the future and the place it offers for different identity groups.
- Instigate a project in schools and other institutions for young people to think about their society and their place in it and the place of other identity groups and also invite them to reflect on a question such as "What my country means to me". This could use mediums such as art, drama, music, poetry, film, photography and story-telling
- Implement a national dialogue to exchange views on the nature of the society at present and how it could be changed to satisfy the interests of all sections and interests in society.
- Make government commitments to consider all ideas which emerge from exercises to envisage a future shared society and, where appropriate, incorporate them in legislation and policy. If the Government decided not to so incorporate them, it should also undertake to give a clear rationale and explanation of this decision within 3 months.

See also Commitment # 9

COMMITMENT IX

Promote respect, understanding and appreciation of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity and support local communities in exploring their identity, sharing their experiences with other identity groups and working together with those groups on common concerns.

Suggested options for action:

- Provide resources for the creation of local community organisations and for their activities to promote self awareness within communities and engagement with other communities.
- Create or ensure the creation of networks of local community organisations to engage with each other and encourage wider involvement in inter-community activities.
- Provide resources for the development of local cultural infrastructure and activities which reflect and respect the different cultural backgrounds of members of the community.

Encourage cultural activities that explore issues of concern about relationships between different identity groups.

Create opportunities for the expression of the diversity of communities in society including the recognition of special days and specific symbols that are meaningful to those communities.

- Initiate awareness programmes to encourage respect for difference. It should highlight the positive features of pluralism and diversity and the obligations of living in a shared society and building a shared future.
- Develop and promote the implementation of awareness programmes on the nature of racism and sectarianism and how they can be combated at an individual and group level throughout all levels of society.
- Establish and support training programmes to train skilled community facilitators to work with local communities in establishing local groups and organisations and in exploring issues of cultural identity and diversity.
- Where there is a legacy of bitter conflict within the community or state, consideration should be given to how best to address the feelings and concerns of different sections of society including the contribution that a truth and reconciliation commission might make to building social cohesion.
- Create synergies between programmes in schools and colleges to promote awareness of the value of mutual awareness and respect and activities at community level, and involve leaders and representatives of local ethnic communities in school programmes.

COMMITMENT X

Take steps to reduce tensions and hostility between communities and ensure members of all communities are protected from abuse, intimidation and violence.

Suggested options for action:

- Promote public awareness of the damage to individuals and the whole society as a result of intercommunity conflict and encourage the community to be vigilant in identifying and challenging situations that might lead to tension.

- Establish mechanisms at local community levels to improve communication among leaders from each community and equip them with the resources and skills to be able to neutralize and resolve critical situations before they escalate.

- Ensure the police service is equipped with the necessary powers to deal with those who promote, exacerbate or manipulate racial or ethnic tensions.

- Ensure officers of the police service are trained to police divided communities sensitively taking account of the customs and values of minority groups, and to recognise the value of working with local community leaders.

- Develop early warning systems to monitor inter-community relations and identify where preventive action is required.



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