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Sustainability

CORI JUSTICE COMMISSION

Policy Briefing

Sustainability is a crucial issue for people and the environment in the 21st century. Too often, however, sustainability is defined in terms that are too narrow. Sustainability is about a range of including environmental, economic and social.

The search for a humane, sustainable model of development has gained momentum in recent times. After years of trust in market forces to produce a better life for everyone, major problems and unintended side-effects have raised questions and doubts. There is a growing awareness that sustainability must be a constant factor in all development, whether social, economic or environmental.

This fact was reiterated by Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the opening of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. There he stated that the aim of the conference was

“to bring home the uncomfortable truth that the model of development that has prevailed for so long has been

fruitful for the few, but flawed for the many”

and he further added that “the world today, facing the twin challenges of poverty and pollution, needs to usher in a season of transformation and stewardship – a season in which we make a long overdue investment in a secure future”

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways. Perhaps the best-

There's an old saying which goes:

Once the last tree is cut and the last river poisoned, you will find you cannot eat your money

- Joyce McLean (1860-1904)

known definition is that contained in *Our Common Future (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:43):*

“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”

It is crucial that the issues of environmental, economic and social sustainability be firmly at the core of the decision-making process.

In this *Policy Briefing* CORI Justice Commission outlines initiatives it believes should be taken if it is to ensure policies support sustainable development into the future. Among these are:

- Introduce ‘shadow’ national accounts that include not just money transactions but also measure social and environmental variables such as the value of unpaid work and the consumption of finite natural resources.
- Honour the Kyoto protocol on CO₂ emissions.
- Address global poverty and inequality in an integrated way so as to secure environmental, economic and social sustainability and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.
- Eliminate relative income poverty in Ireland.
- Activate the EU objective to decouple transport from economic growth.
- Address the implications of Ireland’s rapid population growth.

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Policy Briefing is a regular publication issued by the CORI Justice Office. It addresses a wide range of current policy issues from the perspective of those who are poor and/or socially excluded. Comments, observations and suggestions on this briefing are welcome.

The need for shadow national accounts

Conventional economic models of development or progress fail to meet the needs of millions and millions of people on this planet today. This failure is evident even within better-off countries such as Ireland. These conventional economic models also compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs. As this becomes more evident, there is a growing demand worldwide to find new models that will conserve the planet and its resources and empower people to meet their own needs and the needs of others.

Central to any model of development which has sustainability at its core must be a realisation of the need to move away from money-measured growth, as the principal economic target and measure of success, towards sustainability in terms of real-life social, environmental and economic variables.

Already within mainstream decision-making, this realisation has begun to have some impact. This can be seen, for example, in the growing awareness that environmental taxation should be recognised as a key policy instrument in dealing with environmental concerns. Public concern in the area of genetically modified (GM) food stands as another example. In the context of income and social welfare policy, the increasing recognition of the benefits of a basic income are a further example of the same search for policies that will be sustainable into the future. The growing demand for the recognition of unpaid work being done in society stands as yet another example. As can be seen from these examples, however, there is a long way to go before Ireland or the EU can claim to have placed sustainability at the centre of their development models.

A central initiative in this context should be the development of “satellite” or “shadow” national accounts. Our present national accounts miss fundamentals such as environmental sustainability. Their emphasis is on GNP/GDP as scorecards of wealth and progress. These measures, which came into widespread use during World War II, more or less ignore

the environment, and completely ignore unpaid work. Only money transactions are tracked. Ironically, while environmental depletion is ignored, the environmental costs of dealing with the effects of economic growth, such as cleaning up pollution or coping with the felling of rain forests, are added to, rather than subtracted from, GNP/GDP. New scorecards are needed.

Already a number of alternative scorecards exist, such as the United Nations’ Human Development Index (HDI), former World Bank economist Herman Daly’s Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) and Hazel Henderson’s Country Futures Index (CFI).

A 2002 study by Wackernagel et al presented the first systematic attempt to calculate how human demands on the environment are matched by its

capacity to cope. It found that we currently use 120 per cent of what the earth can provide sustainably each year.

In the environmental context it is crucial that dominant economic models are challenged on (among other things) their assumptions that nature’s capital (clean air, water and environment) are essentially free and inexhaustible; that scarce resources can always be substituted; and that the planet can continue absorbing human and industrial wastes which most economists tend to downplay as externalities.

Some governments have picked up on these issues, especially in the environmental area. They have begun to develop “satellite” or “shadow” national accounts, which include items not traditionally measured. Similar accounts should be developed for Ireland.

Sustainable development principles

Principles to underpin sustainable development have been suggested in a report for the European Commission prepared by James Robertson in May 1997.

Entitled *The New Economics of Sustainable Development*, the report argues that these principles would include the following:

- systematic empowerment of people (as opposed to making and keeping them dependent) as the basis for people-centred development
- systematic conservation of resources and environment as the basis for environmentally sustainable development
- evolution from a “wealth of nations” model of economic life to a “one-world” economic system
- evolution from today’s international economy to an ecologically sustainable, decentralising, multi-level one-world economic system

- restoration of political and ethical factors to a central place in economic life and thought
- respect for qualitative values, not just quantitative values
- respect for feminine values, not just masculine ones.

At first glance, these might not appear to be the concrete guidelines that policy-makers so often seek. Yet they are principles that are relevant to every area of economic life. They also apply to every level of life, ranging from personal and household to global issues. They impact on lifestyle choices and organisational goals. If these principles were applied to every area, level and feature of economic life they would provide a comprehensive checklist for a systematic policy review.

**For more information
on Sustainability see
www.corii.ie/justice**

Pollution and climate change

Our environment is a priceless asset. Its protection is of major importance not just to current times but also to the generations that will follow us. However, the environment is regularly taken for granted, it is often mistreated and excessively exploited. Damaging our environment through pollution and the knock-on effects of climate change are unsustainable trends.

Ireland's air has become more and more polluted. Between 1990 and 2002 the CSO reveals that Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions grew by 29 per cent.

Total combined Irish emissions of the three main greenhouse gases regarded as having global warming potential amounted to 68.8m tonnes of CO₂-equivalent in 2002, up from 53.4m tonnes in 1990. Preliminary figures for 2003 (the latest available) suggest a decline in emissions to 66.6m tonnes, 24.7 per cent above the 1990 level.

While the 2003 figures indicate a decline, the current levels of emissions now exceed the limits agreed under the Kyoto protocol.

CORI Justice Commission welcomes Ireland's ongoing commitment to this protocol. However, these emissions are a major cause of climate change, and it is in all our interests to ensure that the limits agreed in the Kyoto protocol are met. The Irish government and the European Commission agreed a target of an 8 per cent reduction in European CO₂ emissions on their 1990 level by 2012. Within this agreement, Ireland agreed to limit its increase of CO₂ emissions to 13 per cent between 1990 and 2012. Major changes are required if we are to reduce our emissions towards this target.

Central to this is the need for full implementation of the National Climate Change Strategy. However, the decision in 2004 to allow Ireland's 100 largest industrial companies to maintain their current levels of emissions

does not assist in progressing towards these aims.

The National Climate Change Strategy proposed to impose (unspecified) taxes on oil, gas, coal and other fossil fuels to be phased in from 2002. However, in spite of a few budgetary innovations, there has been limited progress in implementing this proposal.

Finally, a 2003 report prepared for the EPA by Department of Geography at the NUI Maynooth, presented an assessment of the magnitude and likely impacts of climate change in Ireland over the course of the current century. Entitled *Climate Change: scenarios & impacts for Ireland* the report found that Ireland will experience increases in temperatures and decreases in precipitation as a direct result of climate change. It also suggested that there were a series of specific implications for agriculture, water resources, forestry, sea-levels and eco-systems as a result of these climate changes.

Managing resources

Our natural resources need to be more carefully managed. This is particularly the case given the projections of large population growth in the years ahead. For Ireland, our population will exceed 5 million people by 2021. Globally the scale of rapid population growth is best reflected in the statistic that by 2010 there will be 400 million more people on Earth compared to now. Given these figures, we cannot continue to produce and consume as we are doing today.

Some of the responses to preserving Ireland's natural resources include better waste management policies that minimise landfill and maximise recycling. Studies suggest that almost 80% of household waste and 94% of industrial waste can be recycled. Yet, our recycling levels are well below these figures.

Similarly, we need to preserve our fresh water. Globally there are increasing problems with water shortages and pollution. Both the EU and the UN have warned of a global water crisis given the climate change trends outlined earlier. In Ireland, we have slowly improved the quality of our surface water. However, in spite of some recent progress the EPA found that 30% of the nation's river channel is classified as polluted to some extent. Groundwater is also a concern with bacteriological contamination rates remaining high.

Transport problems

The EU has an objective to decouple transport from economic growth. However, over time this is not being met. The growth of transport, primarily private and commercial transport, has impacts on a wide number of areas. These include damage to the environment via the use of natural resources, damage to people's quality of life via additional congestion and damage to people's health via pollution.

In Ireland, the growth in traffic on our roads has been one of the more visible elements of our recent economic growth. However, the lack of an extensive public transport system has resulted in enormous growth in car usage. As table 1 shows. Irish cars cover more kilometres each year than the cars of any EU country. Given that we are a small island, this is an amazing statistic. We need to heavily invest in urban and rural public transport programmes to address this imbalance.

Table 1: Average km per car per annum

IRELAND	24,400 km
UK	16,300 km
EU-average (14 countries)	12,800 km
Italy	10,200 km
Spain	8,200 km

Global poverty and inequality

Globally, the scale and extent of underdevelopment and inequality remains large and stands as a major impediment to the development of a sustainable world. An indication of the size of this problem was outlined in the 2004 United Nations Human Development Report. Tables 2 (a) and (b) present an insight into the scale and extent of these problems using the latest UN data.

Table 2 (a) shows that today almost 1.1 billion people live in absolute poverty on less than one dollar a day. This equates to approximately one fifth of the world's population. Future projections suggest that by 2015, this figure will increase to 1.7 billion people. In Africa alone, over 90 per cent of the population lives in abject poverty. Overall, the vast majority of those who experience this level of poverty live in the South (the Third World).

Coupled with poverty is the ongoing problem of malnourishment. Worldwide some 831 million people have a less than basic food supply and as a consequence their health and survival is continually compromised. One manifestation of this is the very high level of child mortality, measured as the number of deaths per thousand children aged under 5 years. In 2000 11 million children died with these figures concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The extent of the underdevelopment problem being experienced in poorer regions is further revealed by the fig-

Table 2(a): United Nations development indicators

Region	No's living on less than \$1 a day	No's who are under-nourished	Child mortality: no's of under-5 deaths
Sub-Saharan Africa	323m	185m	5m
Arab States	8m	34m	1m
East Asia & the Pacific	261m	212m	1m
South Asia	432m	312m	4m
Latin America & the Caribbean	56m	53m	0m
Central/Eastern Europe & CIS	21m	33m	0m
Worldwide total	1,100m	831m	11m

ures in table 2 (b). In 2000, 1.197 billion people worldwide did not have access to clean water and 2.7 billion people did not have access to adequate sanitation. The lack of these basic facilities once again undermines the health and survival of people living in

less developed regions. Finally, the fact that 104 million children of primary school age are not enrolled in, and therefore not attending, school is worrying. The lack of basic education levels for future generations must be a concern.

Table 2(b): United Nations development indicators

Region	No's without access to clean water	No's without access to adeq. sanitation	No's of primary aged children not enrolled
Sub-Saharan Africa	273m	299m	44m
Arab States	42m	51m	7m
East Asia & the Pacific	453m	1,004m	14m
South Asia	225m	944m	32m
Latin America & the Caribbean	72m	121m	2m
Central/Eastern Europe & CIS	29m	0m	3m
Worldwide total	1,197m	2,742m	104m

Poverty in Ireland

The most up-to-date data available on poverty in Ireland comes from the 2003 *EU-SILC* survey, conducted by the CSO. Table

3 presents their key findings showing poverty levels among the Irish population. Using the EU poverty line set at 60 per cent of median income, the

findings reveal that in 2003 more than one in every five of those living in Ireland were living in poverty. The table also indicates that there has been a sustained growth in the proportion of the population living below these lines.

As it is sometimes easy to overlook the sheer scale of Ireland's poverty problem it is useful to translate the poverty percentages into numbers of people. These calculations are also presented in table 3. Given this scale of poverty it has to be asked, how sustainable is Irish society in the long run?

Table 3: The numbers of people in poverty in Ireland, 1998-2003

	% of persons in poverty	Population of Ireland	Numbers living in poverty
1998	19.8	3,703,000	733,194
2000	20.9	3,789,500	792,005
2001	21.9	3,847,100	842,515
2003	22.7	3,978,800	903,188

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

As part of the process of enhancing global sustainability, the UN Millennium Declaration was adopted in 2000 at the largest-ever gathering of heads of state. It committed countries - both rich and poor - to doing all they can to eradicate poverty, promote human dignity and equality, achieve peace, democracy and environmental sustainability.

World leaders promised to work together to meet concrete targets for advancing development and reducing poverty by 2015 or earlier. Emanating from the Millennium Declaration, a set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was agreed. These bind countries to do more in the attack on inadequate incomes, widespread hunger, gender inequality, environmental deterioration and lack of education, health care and clean water. They also include actions to reduce debt and increase aid, trade and technology transfers to poor countries. These goals and their related targets are:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day.

Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and

Slow progress on MDGs

To date progress on these goals and targets has been mixed with some regions doing better than others. In particular the 2004 UN Human Development Report suggest that East Asia and the Pacific are progressing satisfactorily but that overall "human development is proceeding too slowly".

The UN also note that the pace of development is so slow in Sub-Saharan Africa that "at the current pace Sub-Saharan Africa will not meet the goal for universal primary education until 2129 or the goal for reducing child mortality by two-thirds until 2106 - 100 years away, rather than the 11 called for by the goals. In three of the goals - hunger, income poverty and access to sanitation - no date can be set because

In three of the goals - hunger, income poverty and access to sanitation - no date can be set for reaching the goals in Sub-Saharan Africa because the situation in the region is worsening, not improving

the situation in the region is worsening, not improving".

Poverty and its associated implications remains the root cause of regional conflicts and civil wars in many poor countries. States and societies that are poor are prone to conflict. It is very difficult for governments to

govern adequately when their people cannot afford to pay taxes, and industry and trade are almost non-existent. Poverty is also a major cause of environmental degradation.

(UNDP, 2004)

CORI Justice Commission believes that the world needs to

play a more active role in assisting less developed countries achieve these goals. Central to this will be the provision of additional financial support by all Western governments.

begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 10: Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

Target 11: Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 12: Develop further an open, rule based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system

Target 13: Address the special trade

needs of the least developed countries

Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term

Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.

Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies.

EU sustainability strategy

Sustainable development is a fundamental objective of the EU. Its importance is reflected in the EU Treaty and taken up in the proposed Constitution, which challenges the EU “to work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment”.

In early 2005 the EU Commission set about reviewing its Sustainable Development Strategy which contains the following components. First, it sets out a broad vision of what is sustainable. The strategy’s basic message is that, ultimately, the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability must go hand-in-hand and mutually reinforce one another: Second the strategy, seeks to improve the way the EU and member state Governments make policies. Third, the strategy addresses a limited number of trends that are clearly not sustainable, such as the issues of climate change, threats to public health, poverty and social exclusion, ageing societies, natural resources, and land use and transport. Finally, a global dimension focuses on some of the international goals and objectives identified in the EU contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The complete document is available at www.cori.ie/justice

ODA contribution

CORI Justice Commission regrets the recent decision by the Government not to honour its pledge to increase Ireland’s Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.7 per cent of GNP by 2007.

Over time Ireland has achieved sizeable increases in our ODA allocation. Between 1993 and 2003 our contribution has climbed from 0.18 per cent of GNP to 0.40 of GNP. However, an interim government target of achieving 0.45 per cent of GNP by 2002 was not reached. The lack of progress towards the 0.7 per cent target led the OECD’s development assistance committee to describe Ireland as “faltering” in its movement towards the target. The years 2003 and 2004 were the first time that Ireland’s contribution as a % of GNP slipped backwards.

CORI Justice Commission believes that the ODA commitment should now be met by 2010. In a submission to Government, we recently set out the path which Government should follow if it is to meet this target. We proposed a set of programmed funding increases to be implemented in the exchequer Estimates and Budgets for 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010. Adopting these proposed increases would result in the ODA as a percentage of GNP figure growing from 0.41 per cent in 2005 to the target of 0.7 per cent in 2010. By 2010, Irish ODA should amount to almost €1,328m. The complete submission is available at www.cori.ie/justice

Basic Income

An honest appraisal of the development model being offered to the world’s poorest people today leads to a startling conclusion: it is not going to deliver its promise of providing sufficient income for all to live with dignity. This development model argues that jobs for all is the way forward and that income will be distributed through payment for these jobs.

The problem, however, is that there is no possibility of the numbers unemployed in the Third World being reduced in any meaningful way any time soon. According to the UN the numbers living in abject poverty (less than \$1 a day) is set to rise from 1.1 billion today to 1.7 billion by 2015.

An alternative income distribution system is required if these societies are to have any hope of ensuring their populations can live life with dignity.

A Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) would be a much better option. It is being considered in a wide range of countries today ranging from Brazil to South Africa. The IMF has recommended that a BIG be introduced in countries ranging from Nigeria to Iraq.

The Irish Government has published a Green Paper on Basic Income which showed its introduction in Ireland would have a significant impact on the poverty of Ireland’s poorest people. An initiative such as the introduction of BIG would have a positive impact in both bet-ter-off and Third World countries.

Funding sustainable dev.

Assisting third world countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals, and as a consequence develop sustainably, is an objective of all Western governments. However, there has been much discussion on how the funds needed to pay for this assistance can be raised.

One interesting suggestion that has arisen within the European Union is a small environmental tax levied on Kerosene, the high-powered fuel used by airplanes. This fuel is currently untaxed and the introduction of a small tax on each liter is seen as feasible. This idea has been gaining increasing support at a European Finance Minister level.

In particular this tax is seen as offering potential to collectively raise a large amount of money across all EU countries; money that would be ring-fenced for use in anti-poverty projects and meeting the Millennium Development Goals, in the developing world.

CORI Justice Commission believes that such a tax would have limited, if any, effect on the aviation industry and offers a way for EU countries to raise badly needed funds for addressing development issues.

Such a tax would guarantee the provision of badly needed revenue and speed up the process of building a more integrated and sustainable world.

Main Policy Recommendations on Sustainability

CORE POLICY OBJECTIVE

To ensure that all development is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable

- Sustainability-proof all public policy initiatives and provision.
- Develop "satellite" national accounts that include the value of all unpaid work and the costs of all environmental damage and resource consumption.
- Restructure the tax system in favour of environmentally benign development and higher levels of employment and useful work.
- Terminate subsidies and other public-expenditure programmes that encourage unsustainable development.
- Introduce public purchasing policies that encourage contractors to adopt sustainable practices.
- Develop more self-reliant local economies.
- Develop and implement a programme of accounting, auditing and reporting procedures to establish the sustainability performance of businesses and other organisations.
- Introduce demand-reduction policies in areas such as energy and transport, and tackle the implications of such reduction.
- Fully introduce the National Climate Change Strategy, including the introduction of new taxes on oil, gas, coal and other fossil fuels.
- Adequately resource local authorities to deliver on Agenda 21 (1993) within their own areas.
- Put mechanisms in place to ensure that the targets of an 8 per cent CO₂ reduction by 2012, agreed by the Irish Government and the European Commission, are met.
- Formally commit to reaching the United Nations target of contributing 0.7 per cent of GNP to Overseas Development Assistance by 2010.
- Government should live up to the commitments it signed up to at the World Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002.
- Work for changes in the existing international trading régimes, to encourage fairer and sustainable forms of trade.
- Target funding strategies to ensure that far greater priority is given to providing an easy-access, affordable and high-quality public transport system.
- Acknowledge that Ireland has a serious poverty problem, the largest in the European Union, that to date has not been significantly addressed by government.
- Move decisively to shift the burden of taxation from income tax to eco-taxes on the consumption of water, fuel and fertilisers, as well as on the disposal of waste.
- Introduce carbon and environmental taxes.
- Immediately develop policies that will allow Ireland to sustainably develop and meet the challenges of the large population growth projected by the CSO.
- Invest in measures that will allow Ireland to address the empirical and methodological gaps which continue to impede the incorporation of sustainable development issues into public policy making and assessment.

Ireland's population growth and sustainability

An essential element of any society is its ability to plan for the future. In that context an important insight into Ireland's future was provided during late 2004 as part of the Central Statistics Office (CSO)

report on expected population trends. Entitled *Population and Labour Force Projections, 2006-2036* the report signalled a dramatic demographic transformation due to occur in Ireland over the next three decades. Table 4 presents its main findings.

Table 4: Irish Population, 2002-2036

Year	Population
2002	3,917,000
2006	4,168,000
2011	4,505,000
2016	4,854,000
2021	5,140,000
2026	5,399,000
2031	5,613,000
2036	5,820,000

It shows the CSO forecast that Ireland's population will climb from approximately 4 million people today to 5.1 million people by 2121 and on to 5.8 million people in 2036. In simple terms, this implies that our population will increase by almost 50 per cent or almost 2 million people in just 34 years (2002-2036).

There are major implica-

tions for Ireland's development as a result of this increase. Where will all these extra people be housed? How will they travel around? What additional education and health facilities are required to provide for such additional numbers?

How can Ireland ensure that we build a fair and inclusive society which can adequately cater for all these extra people?

CORI Justice Commission believes that these figures necessitate the development of long term planning. Rather than cope with the implications of this population growth once it has happened, we believe it is important to begin to plan now for its arrival.

To do this successfully, sustainable policies need to be developed; policies that work with a time frame of at least 10 years.

Monitoring sustainable development: some problems

Two recent studies have highlighted the lack of socio-economic and environmental data in Ireland required to assess trends in sustainable development.

A chapter by Ana Carrie in the recent *Feasta Review* (no. 2) focused on the lack of long-run socio-economic data on issues such as education participation, crime and healthcare. Another paper by Sue Scott of the ESRI outlined the empirical and methodological gaps which continue to impede the incorporation of sustainable development issues into public policy making and assessment.

CORI Justice Commission believes that more resources need to be allocated to gathering this data and upskilling Ireland's policy makers to consider these issues.

It is important that any programme for sustainable development should take a

realistic view of human nature, recognising that people are altruistic and selfish, co-operative and competitive. Consequently it is important to develop the economic system to reward activities that are socially and environmentally benign (and not the reverse, as at present). This in turn would make it easier for people and organisations to make choices that are socially and environmentally responsible. A simple example is the tax on plastic bags. It shows how quickly people can and will change. In just one week some retail outlets were reporting a 90 per cent reduction in the use of plastic bags. Overall the Department of Environment and Local Government estimated that usage had declined by 95 per cent in 2002.

Any programme for sustainable development has implications for public spending. In addressing this issue it needs to be understood that public

expenditure programmes and taxes provide a framework which helps to shape market prices, rewards some kinds of activities and penalises others. Within this framework there are other areas which are not supported by public expenditure or are not taxed. This framework should be developed to encourage economic efficiency and enterprise, social equity and environmental sustainability. Systematic reviews should be carried out and published on the sustainability effects of all public subsidies and other relevant public expenditure and tax differentials. Such reviews could then lead to the elimination of subsidies that favour unsustainable development. Systematic reviews should also be carried out and published on the possibilities for re-orientating public spending programmes, with the aim of preventing and reducing social and environmental problems.

Other Justice Commission Publications

The following documents are available for purchase from the Justice Commission Office:

- **Pathways to Inclusion** (CORI Justice Commission's annual socio-economic review - 2005)
- **Policy Briefing on Housing**
- **Analysis and Critique of Budget 2005**
- **A Fairer Tax System for a Fairer Ireland**
- **Policy Briefing on Education**
- **Policy Briefing on Taxation**
- **Policy Briefing on Work, Unemployment and Job Creation**

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CORI Justice Commission publishes books and regular briefings on a wide range of public policy issues. The Commission's core areas of work are: public policy; spirituality; enabling and empowering; advocacy and communication. CORI Justice Commission has been a recognised social partner within the Community and Voluntary Pillar of social partnership since 1996.

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