

*This is the shortened version of a discussion paper prepared by the Democracy Group of Claiming our Future. It is intended to stimulate debate amongst claiming our future participants, at local and national level. This is one of three papers which look at: better local government, the conditions for participation, and the Constitution. Claiming our Future will host a series of local meetings on these and other themes in the lead up to a national meeting on democracy on Saturday 26 May in Dublin. The longer discussion paper is available on the Claiming our Future website: [www.claimingourfuture.ie](http://www.claimingourfuture.ie).*

*The ambition of the Democracy group is to deepen discussion of the third policy priority adopted by Claiming our Future in October 2010: 'to change the way we govern ourselves'. To get involved, or to comment on this paper you can contact Anna Visser on [annavisser@eircom.net](mailto:annavisser@eircom.net), or call Claiming our Future on 018870726.*



## CLAIMING OUR FUTURE

a progressive movement for an equal,  
sustainable and thriving Ireland

### *Conditions for Effective Participation*

**Democracy Group Discussion Paper**

March 2012

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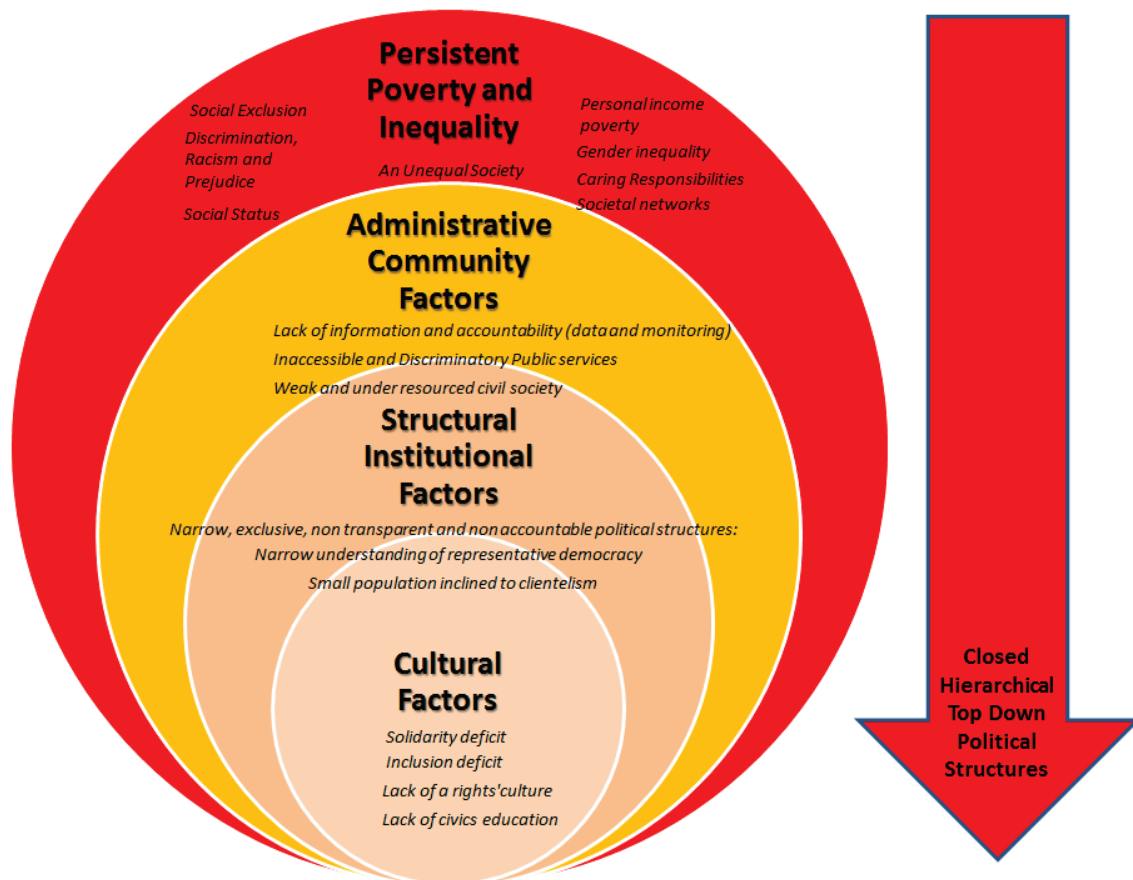
## 1 Introduction.

One of Claiming Our Future's key themes is to work for changes in the way we govern ourselves. We want our democratic structures to better reflect and promote our core values of equality, environmental sustainability, participation, accountability and solidarity. This means we want more open and inclusive democratic structures which foster greater democratic participation in society. This will involve **both** transforming our existing constitutional and institutional structures (see issues papers on constitutional reform and local government) **and** addressing the barriers that currently exist to participation. To do this we need to actively build an environment and culture which enables and empowers people to participate and influence the decisions that affect their lives and to have control over those who make decisions on their behalf. This short issues paper lists some of the main barriers that currently limit greater democratic participation. It then suggests some of the things that need to be done to overcome them. It is intended as a starting point to stimulate discussion and debate among local Claiming Our Future groups.

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## 2 What are the key barriers to effective democratic participation?

There are many persistent and overlapping factors which disempower many people from participating fully in society and which act as barriers to democratic engagement. These include cultural, structural/institutional and administrative/community factors together with the effects of persistent poverty and inequality. Some examples of some of these barriers are given in the diagram below.



### Questions for discussion:

- *What do you think are the main factors limiting democratic participation? What would you add to or change in the list of factors identified in the diagram above?*
- *Why have these factors been so persistent and why has there been such reluctance to discuss the development of a broader more participative type of democracy?*
- *Do you think that the current economic and financial crisis creates a new opportunity to address some of the issues and to create a real debate on how to create a more inclusive democratic and egalitarian democratic system? Why and how?*

### 3 What is needed to enable greater participation?

In order to increase effective participation and to overcome the barriers that hinder democratic participation we need a combination of cultural, structural/institutional and administrative changes combined with actions to tackle poverty and inequality. The diagram below suggests some of the actions that are needed in each of these areas.



#### **Questions for discussion:**

- *What do you think are the main steps that need to be taken to increase democratic participation? What would you add to or change in the list of ideas identified in the diagram above?*
- *Which actions do you think are the most important for Claiming Our Future to focus on?<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed version of this paper expanding on the points made is available on the Claiming Our Future web site at: <http://www.claimingourfuture.ie/>

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