



Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion on the Island of Ireland – Context, Policies and Challenges

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Aims

The Island of Ireland is facing challenging times - socially, economically and environmentally. Rural communities, which make up 35% of the population of Northern Ireland and 39% of the population of the Republic of Ireland (using the broad Central Statistics Office definition of rural) are not immune to these challenges. Poverty and exclusion manifest themselves differently in rural areas than they do in urban areas. Addressing rural poverty and social exclusion requires a clear understanding of the particular challenges and issues facing rural communities particularly in relation to their ability to access key services. Addressing social inclusion and poverty in rural areas also requires a better balance between economic development and social provision and between the more prosperous east and the west. Finally and indeed critically addressing rural poverty and social exclusion also requires political commitment to increased level of policy integration and implementation at all levels of decision making.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the nature and extent of poverty and exclusion in rural communities and the socio-economic factors that shape its existence north and south. Key areas explored within the paper include the:

- Identification of who experiences poverty and social exclusion in rural communities on the island of Ireland
- Wider rural development and social inclusion policy context.
- Identification of the shortcomings in relation to policy responses, paying particular attention to the interplay between European policies focused on rural development, agricultural development and social inclusion as they are operationalised on the island.
- Challenges for the development of more integrated frameworks for addressing social exclusion in rural communities.

The paper considers and compares the situation across the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland for the purposes of supporting a more comprehensive and challenging understanding of rural social exclusion and the policy priorities across the island of Ireland. It is hoped that this understanding will assist more effective implementation of social inclusion strategies within a broader matrix of regional development and environmental challenges into the future.

1.2 Defining Social Exclusion, Poverty, Disadvantage and Deprivation

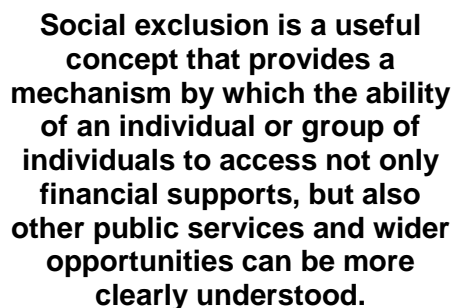
1.2.1 Defining Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is a complex and dynamic process which relates to the breakdown of the systems in society that should guarantee the social integration of the individual or household. It focuses less on individuals and groups and more on the processes that cause exclusion. It is useful in that it recognises the importance of the local context in such processes (including issues related to lack of employment/educations opportunities and isolation). In recent years policies and policy debates have increasingly focused on social exclusion rather than on poverty. Partnership 2000¹ defined social exclusion as '*cumulative marginalisation: from production (unemployment), from consumption (income poverty), from social networks (community, family and neighbours), from decision making and from an adequate quality of life*'.

¹Dept of the Taoiseach (1998) Partnership 2000

Social exclusion was identified in the Partnership 2000 agreement as *'one of the major challenges currently facing Irish society'*.

The concept of 'social exclusion' clearly has to do with poverty and joblessness – but it is more than that. It is about being cut off and marginalised from wider social and economic activities. The causes of social exclusion are many and varied, individuals may, for example, be poorly skilled, unemployed, living on a low income or coping with difficult home circumstances, they may live in poor housing or areas blighted by crime or may indeed be living in an isolated with limited access to transport. In many cases they can have difficulties accessing services that others take for granted. Among the key areas of inequality identified by the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland and closed linked to exclusion included: educational achievement, employment, health and social care, housing and communities, participation in public life and prejudice. The adoption of the lifecycle approach as a framework for organising actions to combat social exclusion is a relatively recent development, developed in response to the realisation that interventions need to be brought together in a more integrated way.



Social exclusion is a useful concept that provides a mechanism by which the ability of an individual or group of individuals to access not only financial supports, but also other public services and wider opportunities can be more clearly understood.

Social exclusion is not without its critics as a concept. Some researchers² view social exclusion as an 'intrinsically problematic' concept that can lead to an 'overly homogenous and consensual view of society.' burying large-scale inequalities within a discourse that suggests poverty affects only a residual minority. This analysis has resonance in the Republic of Ireland in particular, where it has been argued that the booming economy/rising tide benefited the majority and left behind a residual category'. This argument is continued into a critique of the fusion of the concepts of exclusion and inclusion. Conroy and others argue that the inclusion should not be about offering to poor people or poor neighbourhoods what other groups in society already have, such as access to education and transport but is instead about the exercise of, the rights of citizenship, in that as citizens individuals and communities have rights to services equal to others.

Notwithstanding this critique, social exclusion is a useful concept that provides a mechanism by which the ability of an individual or group of individuals to access not only financial supports but also other public services and wider opportunities can be more clearly understood.

1.2.2 Defining Poverty

A 2009 Combat Poverty Agency report³ described poverty as being

'...more than having no money. It means social isolation, shame, powerlessness. It means getting sick and not being able to buy medicine. Living in cold, damp conditions. Going to school hungry. Not having a job, it went on to state that 'Poverty has to be understood not just as a disadvantaged and insecure economic condition, but also in terms of how people in poverty

² Conroy, P., Mahon, M., Doyle M., Reddin, S with Byrne, E. (2008) *Out of Sight-Out of Mind: Supporting Hard-to Reach Groups to Participate in Decisions that Affect Their Lives*, Combat Poverty Agency

³ Combat Poverty Agency (2009) *Understanding Poverty: An Introductory Guide to Poverty in Ireland*. CPA, Dublin.

interact with wider society'. This view of poverty resonates with the Irish and Northern Irish definitions of poverty.

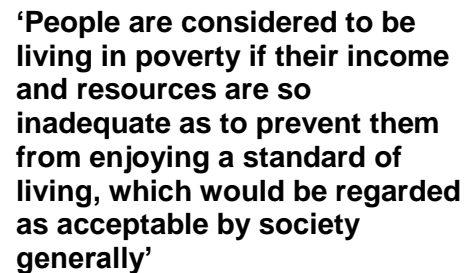
This understanding of poverty (which marks a move away from an earlier almost exclusive focus on income poverty) is useful because it

- Recognises that people have social, cultural and emotional needs, as well as physical and economic needs.
- Recognised that living in poverty is not just about lack of money. It can also mean feeling excluded, isolated, powerless and discriminated against.

The adoption of a wider understanding of poverty and exclusion enables consideration of

- Those at risk of poverty,
- The broader aspects of quality of life and,
- The issue of access to services (a particular issue from a rural perspective) and
- The issue of inter-generational poverty.

This move away from an exclusive reliance on income-related measures has occurred across the island and at EU level. This approach to understanding poverty also ensures poverty can be closely linked to the concept of social exclusion as a multi-dimensional, dynamic concept which refers to a breakdown or malfunctioning of the major societal systems that should guarantee the social integration of the individual or household. These include the structural issues linked to democratic and legal system, which promotes civic integration; the labour market, which promotes economic integration; the welfare state system, promoting social integration; and the family and community system, which promotes interpersonal integration. There are three commonly accepted measures of poverty, see Appendix 1 for details of these measures. All three measures focus on income poverty. This is problematic for a number of reasons- the focus is exclusively on the individual, the measures do not consider those at potential risk of falling into poverty neither does do they consider the broader aspects of quality of life and, particularly from a rural perspective, the issue of access to services. Nor indeed do any of these measures account for or address the issue of inter-generational poverty⁴.



'People are considered to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to prevent them from enjoying a standard of living, which would be regarded as acceptable by society generally'

1.2.3 *Defining Disadvantage and Deprivation*

Disadvantage is a widely used term used to describe situations when a group or a community/communities experience circumstances or conditions less favourable than other locations or communities. There is no one widely agreed definition of disadvantage and as such a decision has been made for the purposes of this paper to focus on the issues of exclusion and poverty. Deprivation⁵ has been defined as: "an absence – of essential or desirable attributes, possessions and opportunities which are considered no more than the minimum by that

⁴ Haase, T & Walsh, K (2007) A Study of the Measurement of Rural Disadvantage. Pobal. Rural Advisory Committee,

⁵ Coombes, M, Raybould S, Wong C, & Openshaw S, (1995) "Towards an Index of Deprivation: A Review of Alternative Approaches" Part 1 in Department of the Environment, UK

society.” (can be seen to be deprived if they’ cannot obtain, at all or sufficiently, the conditions of life – that is, the diets, amenities, standards and services – which allow them to play the roles, participate in the relationships and follow the customary behaviour which is expected of them by virtue of their membership of society.”⁶ Deprivation is clearly closely associated with poverty. See Appendix 1 for details of the indices used to measure deprivation.

1.3 Defining Rural

While there is no single agreed definition of ‘rural’, most people believe they know what rural is, defining it by geography and by social and imagined constructions – in that sense rural is often linked to the existence of what is often referred to as the rural idyll. Geographical approaches used to categorise the rural vary from restrictive to inclusive. The Irish Census of Population for example designates all those living in settlements of less than 1,500 inhabitants as the ‘rural population’. Thus, the category of ‘aggregate rural areas’ includes villages of fewer than 1,500 residents, together with those living in the ‘open countryside’. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in their 2005 study⁷ proposed that settlements with a population of 4,500 or less should be defined as rural, although they did also stress that this definition should not be used in a prescriptive way and that government departments and other users should consider defining urban and rural areas in ways that are appropriate to the specific programmes and projects under consideration. Alternative method of defining “rural” used in Northern Ireland include designating local government districts as either rural or urban. An additional classification of rural areas – “accessible” and “less accessible” could also be applied - there are for example very clear differences between the more accessible east and the less accessible west of Northern Ireland.

With no one agreed EU definition of a rural area, the concept is applied in different ways in different member states. A 2008 EU study⁸ has proposed that a definition of rurality be applied to all territorial units at Regional Authority region level (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) 3 level) combining population density, size of the largest urban centre and the share of employment in the primary sector (agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing). At international level, the most frequently used approach to defining the rural is that proposed by the the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD) who classify regions as Predominantly Rural (PR), Intermediate (IR) and Predominantly Urban (PU). The Regional Policy division of the European Commission who are concerned with the lack of consideration of the issue of accessibility in rural areas are working to divides IR and PR regions into 2 subcategories ("remote regions" and "regions close to a city"), according to their distance from a large urban centre, expressed as the time required to get to the centre by road.

Current rural typologies used on the island include consideration of population density, land use (particularly agriculture), employment patterns and distance from urban settlements/service centres. (The population density of the Republic of Ireland was 60.3/km² and 122/km² in Northern Ireland in 2006). Changes in any of these factors can in turn have an impact on levels

⁶ Townsend (1993) *The International Analysis of Poverty*. Harvester Wheatsheaf. London.

⁷ NISRA (2005) Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, NISRA Belfast.

⁸ European Commission (2008) *POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN RURAL AREAS, FINAL STUDY REPORT*. Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Unit E2

of poverty and exclusion in rural areas. For example peripheral rural areas with declining population levels can have particular difficulties accessing and indeed maintaining services (both public and private). In many of these kinds of areas there has indeed been a decline in the availability of local services. Shops, schools, banks, post offices and police stations have closed or indeed been closed in response to market forces and rationalisation programmes. There is also often a lack of facilities (particularly for young people) in these areas.

Papers⁹ prepared as part of the development of the National Spatial Strategy in 2000 identified a series of six distinct “rural area types” covering 2,716 rural DEDs, with the remainder of Ireland classified as urban. Commins¹⁰ in his work identified the existence of up to eight rural areas types. The concept of rural¹¹ used in Northern Ireland is also broken down into a number of categories/ bands as follows:

- Band F Intermediate settlement: populations of 2,250 or more and under 4,500 (outside of the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA) and Derry Urban Area (DUA)),
- Band G Village: population settlements of 1,000 or more and under 2,250 (outside of BMUA and DUA)
- Band H Small Village, hamlet and open countryside: population settlement of 1,000.

Interestingly, the Rural Development Council (RDC) in their various rural baseline reports¹² concluded that there is no single definition of rural but a pattern of areas with similar characteristics. What is clear from a review of the various approaches to defining the rural is that socio-economic problems clearly differ by area, with the clearest geographical contrasts between areas within the sphere of influence of an urban centre, on the one hand and, at the other extreme, the remoter western districts or in the uplands. The population of almost all rural areas grew over the last decade. This expansion is most evident in the east where extensive residential development took place but with deficits in physical infrastructures and in social provision (e.g. schools and recreational facilities), public transport and in services such as childcare. The key to tackling rural poverty and exclusion in particular, is therefore linked to the issue of accessibility of services and opportunities and the creation of a more equitable balance between areas and regions.

The absence of an agreed definition of rural, poses challenges because the way in which rural is defined has the potential to impact on the scope and focus of policies concerned with the development of rural communities (Definitions that include consideration of distance from service centres are more likely to facilitate broader focused development policies, than definitions that focus exclusively on population density and land use).

1.4 Rural Policies and Poverty and Social Exclusion

A range of national policy areas including education, environment, social protection, economic development, health, transport, etc impact on rural areas and rural communities. Some of the policy areas that are particularly critical in the context of poverty and social exclusion are social protection and welfare transfers.

⁹ 2000 National Spatial Strategy Irish Spatial Perspectives – Paper 13 “Rural and Urban Roles”

¹⁰ Commins, P. (2004) ‘Poverty and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas: Characteristics, Processes and Research Issues’ in *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 44, No. 1, p. 60-75.

¹¹ NISRA (2005) Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements

¹² Rural Development Council (2002), (2003), & (2005) Rural Baseline Reports

A 2008 EU level study¹³ identified two broad types of policies that specifically affect rural poverty: 1) policies designed to tackle the poverty of rural areas and 2) policies specifically designed to tackle the poverty and social exclusion of rural people. The first category of policies can be seen to include policies targeted at improving particular sectors of the economy (e.g agri-food sector, sustainable energy, etc), or at reducing disparities between regions. These policies effectively implemented have consequences for the economy of a rural area and may through the creation of employment opportunities indirectly contribute to the reduction of poverty levels, The Republic of Ireland 1999 Rural White Paper indeed identifies the '*creation of dynamic rural economies*' as providing '*the best opportunity to address disadvantage in rural areas*'. Rural development and regional development policies clearly fall into the category of tackling the poverty of rural areas.

Two broad types of policies affect rural poverty and social exclusion 1) policies designed to tackle the poverty of rural areas and 2) policies specifically designed to tackle the poverty and social exclusion of rural people. Rural and Regional Development policies tackle the poverty of rural areas, while Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion policies tackle the poverty of rural people

Only a very small number of policies fall into the category of specifically addressing the needs of the excluded and poor in rural areas. Their success is determined by the extent to which the degree of poverty/exclusion within an area has changed. Social inclusion policies fall into this category. Section 3 contains a more detailed examination of these different policy types.

2. Nature, Extent and Dynamics of rural poverty and social exclusion

2.1 Introduction

This section examines the extent and the nature of poverty and of social exclusion in rural areas across the island of Ireland. It identifies some of the key groups at risk of poverty in rural areas and explores the trends in relation to poverty and social exclusion.

2.2 The Extent of Poverty and Social Exclusion

Rural communities make up 35% of the population of Northern Ireland 39%- 59% of the population of the Republic of Ireland (depending on how rural is defined). Poverty and social exclusion in rural areas and communities are generally more difficult to identify than in urban ones. Various studies¹⁴ have found that the average living standard, (expressed as GDP per head), is generally lower in rural than in urban areas. Rural poverty is clearly associated with the remoter more rural regions although obviously not confined to them. The New Policy Institute¹⁵

¹³ European Commission (2008) *Poverty and Social exclusion in Rural Areas- Final study*. Report DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

¹⁴ European Commission (2008) *Poverty and Social exclusion in Rural Areas- Final study*. Report DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

¹⁵ New Policy Institute (2009) *Monitoring poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland 2009*

found for example that disadvantage was more prevalent in western districts of Northern Ireland. There is also a strong presence of 'rural' in the top 20% of deprived wards as defined by multiple deprivation indicators with the average gross weekly earnings of people in rural areas in Northern Ireland from 2001 to 2006 consistently below those living in urban, with the lowest rate of growth occurring in 'less accessible rural' areas where, according to the local government based definition of rural, 32% of the Northern Ireland population live. The multiple deprivation index is particularly interesting from a rural perspective because it includes a geographical measure of the extent to which people have poor geographical access to key services that include: a post office; GP surgery; Accident and Emergency hospital; dentist; optician; pharmacist; library; museum; Social Security Office or Training and Employment Agency - although this ultimately only makes up 5% of the final composite score.

The Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2008 report¹⁶ reported similar findings in the Republic of Ireland where the at risk of poverty rate was higher in rural areas than urban areas (18.7% in rural areas compared with 11.9% in urban areas) it also found a significant difference between the net disposable household income in urban households (€52,532) compared with rural households (€43,215). The SILC also reported that people in rural areas were more likely to be in consistent poverty than those in urban areas, while the Hasse index of deprivation shows a clear pattern of relative affluence and of increasing disadvantage in concentric circles around the larger urban centres. Educational attainment is also significantly lower in rural than in urban areas particularly in the context of young people aged 15 years and who left school early, while the percent of the rural population with third level education was also lower (19% in rural areas compared to 29% for urban areas in the Republic of Ireland).

Interestingly, research¹⁷ on disadvantage in rural Scotland found that rural people's assessment of the level of poverty they experienced was very different to official definitions of poverty. The research found that rural people generally tended to substantially under-report the level of poverty and exclusion they experienced. A more detailed exploration of this under-reporting of the extent and nature of poverty, found the practice of underreporting was reinforced by the concept of the rural idyll. The researchers found that 'the existence of the notion of a rural idyll' concealed poverty, with the poor unwittingly conspiring with the more affluent to hide their poverty by denying its existence, because of a perceived loyalty to family, the work ethic and good health. The rural idyll can and has been seen by many to be an obstacle to attempts at empowerment, to service provision and to encouraging people to take-up benefit entitlements without stigma or loss of self-esteem. Overcoming resistance to taking up entitlements can indeed be seen as a fundamental task for those seeking to tackle social exclusion.

¹⁶ Fahey, Tony (ed.), Russell, Helen (ed.) & Whelan, Christopher T (ed.) (2008) *The Life Cycle Perspective on Social Inclusion in Ireland: An Analysis of EU-SILC*. ESRI Research Series 3

¹⁷ Shucksmith M. et. al. (1996) *Disadvantage in Rural Areas*. Rural Development Commission report number 29

2.3 The Nature of Rural Poverty and Exclusion

Constructing a baseline of the nature of poverty within rural Northern Ireland and the rural Republic of Ireland is not an easy task to achieve as data sets, where they exist, are currently not sufficiently disaggregated at a local enough level. There are clearly commonalities between urban and rural poverty and exclusion but there are also some significant differences. Other distinctive features of rural poverty and exclusion on the island include:

The invisibility of rural poverty and exclusion¹⁸

Rural disadvantage and exclusion are generally less visible and more dispersed than urban disadvantage. They are as a consequence difficult to measure. The stigma of being disadvantaged in rural areas (only one among many) makes it more unlikely for people to self identify in a rural area. There is also an element of denial of the existence of rural poverty and exclusion with the prevalence of the image of the rural idyll/higher quality of life in rural areas.

The issue of peripherality and distance from larger service centres

Rural areas are often geographically peripheral and rural residents generally have to travel to access services¹⁹. There is a perceived absence of choices/lack of flexibility as people find themselves unable to afford a similar level of accommodation in an more urban area or perhaps lack the necessary skills to be able to access suitable employment. It is also the case that many could not. The 2010 update²⁰ of the Irish National Spatial Strategy found that 'growth in rural areas has been significantly below the overall national rate and the growth which has occurred has to a substantial extent been linked to growth in nearby urban areas. The effect of living on the boundaries of different service providers was also identified as an issue by research²¹ commissioned by the Southern Investing for Health Partnership in Northern Ireland.

The high cost of living

Anecdotal evidence has suggested that the cost of living is more expensive in rural areas. Recent research²² undertaken by the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice demonstrated that the cost of a minimum essential standard of living was higher for rural households compared with their urban counterparts. The higher costs were linked to transport (and in particular to the costs associated with running and maintaining a car, considered a necessity in rural areas where there is insufficient public transport) and to food with many rural households unable to readily access larger shops and avail of the comprehensive range of non branded which are

An important issue in the characterisation of rural poverty and exclusion is the issue of accessibility, expressed in terms of the easiness of access to services and activities which represent common facilities for people living in urban centres (such as schools, hospitals, sports and cultural facilities).

¹⁸ Commission for Rural Communities (2006) *Rural disadvantage: Reviewing the evidence.*

¹⁹ Haase, T & Walsh, K (2007) *A Study of the Measurement of Rural Disadvantage.* Pobal. Rural Development Committee,

²⁰ National Spatial Strategy (2010) *Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update and Outlook Harnessing Potential, Delivering Competitiveness, Achieving Sustainability*

²¹ McCready, A., Donnelly, A., Lowry, T., Clifford, K. & Lane, N., (2007) *Rural Isolation and Poverty.* Southern Investing for Health Partnership

²² The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (2010) *Minimum Essential Budgets for Six Household Types in Rural Areas.*

considerably less expensive than branded items. As a result, many rural dwellers pay more for food driving up their overall costs.

The limited nature of labour market and employment opportunities

The re-structuring of agriculture and the economic recession is leading to a restructuring and narrowing of the economic and employment base of rural areas. The number of people employed in agriculture in the Republic of Ireland²³ has fallen by over 68,000 since 1991, while in the 2001 Census only 3% of the population of Northern Ireland were reported as working in agriculture. The 2005 Rural Ireland Foresight Report has suggested that there could be less than the 10,000 full time commercial farmers in the Republic of Ireland in 2025. This decline in employment opportunities is a particular concern in the context of full time employment being recognised in a recent Joseph Rowntree study²⁴ as the key to addressing poverty and exclusion. The economies of rural areas have become increasingly dependent on public funding and welfare transfers in particular. Rural poverty and exclusion are often the result of low paid, self-employed, part-time and seasonal work rather than long-term unemployment.

Demographic changes

An aging rural population coupled with high levels of out-migration of young people, especially those attending further/third level education is leading to high levels of dependency on welfare transfers in many rural areas²⁵. There is also the issue of the rise in the levels of seasonal populations²⁶ particularly in scenic areas where there is high numbers of holiday homes. High levels of seasonal population while they have the potential to add to local economies can also pose challenges (within the context of a limited housing stock) for the viability and maintenance of key local services (e.g rural national schools, post offices, etc) on a year round basis.

The limited accessibility/availability of key services²⁷

There is an absence limited supply of local delivery of many services in rural areas including

- Public transport²⁸,
- Access to health services in general and long term care for older rural residents in particular
- Third level and further education and training opportunities
- Affordable flexible childcare options
- Facilities for young people,
- Financial services
- Social and affordable housing,
- Policing services (particularly at night) creating a heightened sense of fear, particularly among many older rural residents.
- Affordable waste collection services
- Quality water

The complexity of the issues/the lack of opportunities

²³ NUI Maynooth, University College Dublin & Teagasc (2005) *RURAL IRELAND 2025 Foresight Perspectives*

²⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion, UK*

²⁵ The results of the last Cenci confirm the continued drift of people from rural to urban communities and the aging nature of the rural population on both sides of the border.

²⁶ Keaveney, K (2007) *Contested Ruralities: Housing in the Irish Countryside*. Project No: 5164 NUI Maynooth

²⁷ Haase, T & Walsh, K (2007) *A Study of the Measurement of Rural Disadvantage*. Pobal Rural Development Committee,

²⁸ 20% of rural dwellers in Northern Ireland do not own or have access to a car, while the distribution of households without a car correlated with the areas with the older populations and traditional economies in the western and border counties of the Republic

The interaction between the issues of demography, remoteness, education and labour market can all be seen to be related back to the overarching issue of the 'lack of opportunities' or 'accessibility' for individuals and communities because of their rural location. This view echoes that of Coombes (1995)²⁹ who argues that people are deprived if they are excluded from activities that they wished to undertake because of firstly their personal attributes (health, education, etc.), secondly their possessions (jobs, income, etc.) and thirdly because of where they live, which supports or indeed restricts their ability to access a variety of opportunities and activities. The issue of accessibility was specifically recognised as an issue for the Republic of Ireland by the 2008 EU Poverty and Social Exclusion in rural areas study.

Isolation

Some groups living in rural communities can find themselves for various reasons (including lack of access to transport, lack of disposable income, lack of an accessible peer support network) find themselves very isolated³⁰. Groups specifically identified in this context would include: young people; older people; farm women; lone parents; disabled people; Travellers, migrant workers; refugees and asylum seekers; victims of domestic violence as well as members of the gay lesbian and transgendered community. Recent research³¹ has found a clear link between isolation stress and suicide in rural areas:

Sectarianism and racism

A recent Community Relations Council Northern Ireland (CRC) project³² has found that sectarianism and racism exists in rural areas but are manifested in ways that are different to urban areas. Minority communities often feel more vulnerable than they might in urban segregated areas. The profile of many rural areas has changed dramatically in recent years reflecting patterns of migration and an increase in commuter populations. Attention needs to be given to the needs of indigenous and incomer populations as they seek to adjust to the changing context of local relationships and culture. There is a need to provide ongoing support to different communities (along sectarian divides in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties and across cultural and ethnic grounds across the island) to enable communities share the spaces they live in, this avoiding any unnecessary duplication of scarce services, tackle exclusion and encourage inclusion by encouraging communities interacting socially in common spaces. Rural Community Network (RCN) in their 2008 input for the Anti-Poverty Strategy stated that that poverty cannot be tackled in the absence of good community relations.

Fuel Poverty

Fuel poverty which is defined in Northern Ireland as an individual household having to spend more than 10 % of income on fuel' is more pronounced as an issue within a rural setting. The numbers of people affected by fuel poverty are particularly challenging in Northern Ireland where levels of fuel poverty are significantly higher than other parts of the United Kingdom. Almost half (47%) of all households living in isolated rural areas in Northern Ireland are in fuel poverty, while the three district councils with the highest levels of fuel poverty are all rural. In the Republic of Ireland, rural older people have similar amenities to the working population except

²⁹ Coombes, M, Raybould S, Wong C, & Openshaw S, (1995) "Towards an Index of Deprivation: A Review of Alternative Approaches" Part 1 in Department of the Environment, UK

³⁰ Rural Community Network (2008) Poverty and Place: Defining Rural Poverty: An issues based approach, RCN, Northern Ireland.

³¹ Monk, A (2000) Influence of isolation on stress and suicide in rural areas: An international comparison. Rural Society, Vol 10(3)

³² Community Relations Council A Sharing over Separation – Rural Perspectives project.

that they are twice as likely to lack central heating³³. In Northern Ireland, the prevalence of fuel poverty is monitored every two to four years in contrast it is not routinely monitored by government in the Republic of Ireland³⁴.

The complex nature of rural communities

Rural communities are often erroneously equated with many characteristics including limited social differentiation accompanied by shared values, norms, and social relationships that are largely harmonious. In reality rural communities similar to urban communities can be socially fractured made up of multiple stakeholder groups often with individualistic, and potentially conflicting and incompatible interests. Such conflict can in turn lead to exclusion and isolation that is often difficult to identify and to tackle³⁵.

2.4 Groups Most at Risk of Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion

See Table 1 for details at a national policy level of the groups identified at most risk of poverty and exclusion in rural areas. There has been general move away from the identification of particular groups at risk of risk of poverty and towards the adoption of a life cycle approach. This has been applied differently in the two jurisdictions. In Northern Ireland the focus is on four groups: early years, children and young people, people of working age and older people. In the Republic of Ireland the focus on children and young people, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities.

Table 1. Groups identified as at most risk of rural poverty and exclusion.		
<i>Source</i>	<i>Northern Ireland Groups identified</i>	<i>Republic of Ireland Groups identified</i>
National level Anti-Poverty/Social Inclusion Strategy a) Lifetime Opportunities: Government's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland b) National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007-2016)	Life-cycle groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early years - Children and Young People - Working Age Adults - Older citizens Older people/pensioners living in rural areas Young people and Children (including early years and young children) who are isolated or at risk of poverty in rural areas People of all ages in rural areas	Life-cycle groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children and Young People - People of Working Age - Older people - People with Disabilities Rural communities in general Declining or slow-growing rural populations Low income farming households,

³³ Fahey, T. et al. (2007) Social Portrait of Older People. Dublin: Economic & Social Research Institute;

³⁴ McAvoy, H. (2007) .All-Ireland Policy Paper on Fuel Poverty and Health, Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Dublin.

³⁵ Leech, D, & Walters, J (1995) Stresses on Rural Communities. Paper given as part of the 3rd National Rural Health Conference held in Warwick Medical Centre, Queensland Mt Beauty, 3-5 February 1995

	Rural communities	
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Research undertaken by the Rural Development Council in 2008 as part of the preparatory work for the development of a rural antipoverty and social inclusion framework in contrast identified a number of what they referred to as ‘targeted beneficiaries’³⁶ including: children and young people, the elderly, migrant workers, women and farmers, those with disabilities, carers, rural families (especially low income families or one parent families), Travellers living within rural settlements, rural homeless and rural isolated men. The Rural Community Network as part of their 2008 work³⁷ commissioned recognised experts to produce a series of issues papers. See Table 2 a summary of the findings arising from this analysis.

Table 2 Key Findings/Issues for groups at risk of poverty in rural areas	
<i>Group/Issue</i>	<i>Summary of Issues</i>
Older People	Growing older population, many of whom may have a disability. Will be impacted by wider Northern Ireland trend of pensioner poverty. Specific concerns in relation to isolation and access to and quality of services.
Children and Young People	Isolation, limited access to plan and social activities (facilities then to be focused in relatively population dense areas), lack of childcare, lack of employment and education opportunities for parents
Women	Poverty has a gender dimension and in rural areas there are specific issues linked to access. Those most at risk of poverty include lone parents (the majority of whom are female), those with a disability, minority ethnic women and older women.
Disability	A person who is socially excluded is at greater risk of becoming disabled and someone who becomes disabled is at greater risk of becoming social excluded. The experience of poverty for people with a disability in rural areas is shaped by access within the home and access to and information on quality services
Farmers and farm families	Agriculture plays an important role within rural communities. Extensive low cost framing systems appear to be the most economically feasible allowing the farmer and farm family to avail of off farm employment opportunities
Carers	Low pay coupled with high transport costs, high costs of goods and services and cultural pressures in rural areas mean that many rural carers live in poverty. Careers in rural areas find it difficult to combine paid work or training and care due to the lack of transport and difficulties obtaining support services.
<i>Source: RCN (2008) Poverty and Place Report (p 36-43)</i>	

Groups previously identified³⁸ as being at an increased risk of poverty in rural areas in the Republic of Ireland included unemployed people, women, people with a disability, older people, migrants, local authority tenants, Travellers, lone parents, Gaeltacht communities, fishermen and farmers on small holdings. These groups can be seen to be broadly similar to those identified in Northern Ireland. The move in policy emphasis from ‘vulnerable groups to ‘stages of the lifecycle’ means that there has been a limited national collective consideration of the changing needs of these groups. Notwithstanding this lack of consideration, at local authority

³⁶ Rural Development Council (2008) Research Report undertaken as part of the preparatory work for the development of the Northern Ireland Rural Antipoverty and Social Inclusion Framework. This Framework is due to be published in Autumn 2010.

³⁷ Rural Community Network (2008) Poverty and Place- Defining Rural Poverty an Issues Based Approach

³⁸ National Economic and Social Forum (1997) Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion. Report No 12, NESF, Dublin

(NUTS 4) level measures of poverty remain highly statistically correlated with the nature of economic activity, small-scale farming, economic and age dependency, social class and household composition thus providing ongoing evidence for suggesting that the groups most at risk of poverty in the republic remain low income smallholder households, geographically remote communities, elderly persons living alone, persons with disability, and lone parents.

Section 3: An Overview of Key National Level Policies

3.1 Introduction and the Changing Context for National Policies

This section provides an overview of the various national policies that have an impact on rural communities. It contains a more in-depth examination of social inclusion and rural development policies that impact on rural communities. It focuses exclusively on national level policies, details of some of the key programmes that impact on rural communities are provided in Appendix 2.

Any assessment of national policies must include some consideration of the unprecedented changes that have taken place at national and global levels in terms of global and national economies and in terms of the new and emerging opportunities for rural areas in relation to the green economy in particular. Key among these changes are:

The Economic Downturn

The continuing economic downturn across the island will inevitably lead to an increase in levels of poverty and exclusion, as unemployment levels remain high, costs increase, services are scaled back, welfare payments are cut and general levels of disposable household incomes continue to fall. The Northern Ireland budget was cut by 1.6% in May 2010 and it seems likely that it will be cut further, while there is ongoing speculation about the exact nature and extent of the cuts that will be implemented in the Republic of Ireland as part of the 2011 budget to be announced in December 2010.

In more remote, less accessible rural communities problems continue appear to centre around lack of connectivity (transport, secondary roads, upkeep and maintenance, broadband), lack of timely, affordable access to key services such as specialist healthcare or to well-paid employment and demographic imbalance. It seems unlikely that these problems will be addressed in the current economic climate, as public services continue to be scaled back to reduce costs. Rural communities are particularly affected by the increase in unemployment levels with the continuing drive to restructure the economy and progress towards high-tech and increasingly knowledge-based economic activity which does not favour persons with low levels educational attainment, poor skills and limited experience of 'new economy' employment, many of whom live in rural areas. It is also the case that the ability of farm households to access additional part time off farm employment has been seriously curtailed.

Changing Sources of Income in Rural Areas

Two factors that have to date helped to moderate the challenges associated with rural living include the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) subsidisation of farm incomes. In the more marginal agricultural areas of the west and north non-market income payments now represent

nearly all of the 'operating surplus' in farming. This situation is unlikely to persist beyond 2013 (with the reform of the CAP) posing serious challenges for the farming community. Second, much of the expansion in rural employment on the island was driven by unprecedented growth in construction—in housing and infrastructure. The recent collapse of the housing market and serious curtailment of public spending means that this is no longer the case.

The development of rural areas as key generators of renewable energy (wind, solar, hydro, and biomass), energy efficiency, crops for bio-products, sustainable land use, waste and recycling and green building technologies will undoubtedly provide new employment opportunities in rural areas. The extent to which rural communities can benefit from these developments on the island of Ireland remains to be seen. Research³⁹ conducted in the UK identified 500 community energy projects the vast majority of which were rural and concluded that there is a huge demand for this type of initiative. The Sept 2010 launch of the RASLRES bio energy project which seeks to examine and pilot a number of approaches to address the many barriers towards renewable energy deployment in rural areas is a welcome development in this context.

3.2 A Review of the Policies that Impact on Rural Communities

The 2008⁴⁰ EU level study provides a useful framework for the analysis of the impact on rural areas and communities. Policies can be broken down into two broad types:

- Policies that either a) target particular sectors of the economy (e.g. agri-food sector, education and training, rural development enterprise and employment, environment, housing and accommodation, social protection transfers and taxation, economic development, health, transport, etc), or b) target reducing disparities between regions (e.g. regional development policies). These types of policies can have important consequences for the economy of a rural area. Policy areas that clearly have a positive impact on rural poverty and exclusion relate to incomes, the most obvious being increases in social welfare payments, and national employment and training measures. Policies with negative implications for inclusion include: the centralisation of healthcare provision and public housing measures. Type 1 policies generally focused on particular geographical areas or sectors with limited interaction between these different types of policies. It is particularly important from a rural perspective that the connections between rural and regional development be more clearly drawn and strengthened at a national level and on a cross border basis (where different policy regimes exist but rarely connect).
- Policies that are specifically designed to tackle poverty of rural communities. Only a very limited number of these types of Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion focused policies exist. They are often operated as programmes at a local level.

3.3 Social Inclusion Specific Policies that Impact on Rural Communities

3.3.1 National level Anti-Poverty and Social inclusion policies

The current Irish National Plan⁴¹ for Social Inclusion 2007-2013 while it identifies addressing rural poverty as a strategic aim, does not have a set of policies that are expressly designed to deal with rural (as distinct from urban) poverty and social exclusion. The Plan does recognise

³⁹ Walker, G; Devine-Wright, P. & Evans, Bob (2007) 'Community Energy Initiatives: Embedding Sustainable Technology at a Local Level' (ESRC).

⁴⁰ European Commission (2008) *Poverty and Social exclusion in Rural Areas- Final study*. Report DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

⁴¹ Government of Ireland (2007) *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2007–2013*.

some of the different manifestations of rural poverty/disadvantage including *declining or slow growing populations, migration of younger people from rural to urban areas, lack of services, lack of employment opportunities, low income farming households, higher dependency levels and isolation*. This was however, not translated into strong policy. The original Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS1997-2002) in contrast, identified rural poverty as having a distinct impact which was compounded by ‘aspects of physical isolation and demographic dependence’. Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the current Strategy rests with the Social Inclusion Division in the Dept of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department which up until relatively recently had rural in its title.

Anti-Poverty/Social Exclusion Strategies in both jurisdictions identify the Rural Development Programme as a mechanism for addressing poverty and social inclusion, but do not make any clear linkages with specific elements of the various Programmes.

“*Lifetime Opportunities*” is the Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy⁴² for Northern Ireland. It is structured around a number of general challenges which become the priorities for future policy and action –eliminating poverty in urban and rural areas, eliminating social exclusion, tackling area-based deprivation, inequality in the labour market, health inequalities and cycles of deprivation and looking towards a shared future. Within *Lifetime Opportunities*, rural poverty and social exclusion are specifically highlighted as a key target within each of the life-cycles and a tailored rural specific response to eliminating poverty and social exclusion from rural areas is advocated by Government. The strategy also advocates the use of rural proofing and contains a commitment that every department must rural proof their own policies (p. 84).

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland commissioned the Rural Development Council and the Rural Community Network respectively to undertake some further research on poverty and social exclusion from a rural perspective. This has contributed to the development of a Rural Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework (to be launched late 2010). The Department have under this framework allocated £10 million over 3 years to address a number of key rural poverty and social exclusion challenges including, among other initiatives, a rural childcare programme, a rural challenge programme and an access to benefits, grants and subsidies scheme.

3.4. Development Policies that Impact on Rural Poverty and Social Inclusion

A number of EU and national rural development focused policies can be seen have an impact on rural communities.

3.4.1 EU-instigated rural development focused policies

EU policies and specifically the payments (commodity and non-market (direct) payments to farmers in particular) under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have had a positive effect on the farming community in particular and more indirectly on rural communities in terms of

⁴² Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2007) *Lifetime Opportunities- Government’s Anti-Poverty and Social Exclusion Strategy for Northern Ireland*

bringing additional money into the economy and keeping people out of poverty, through direct payments. EU Regional Policy can also be seen to have facilitated investment in rural infrastructure. This policy is currently implemented across the island through two distinct and large Rural Development Programmes (2007-2013). These programmes were developed and are implemented nationally. €426 million will be invested over the period 2007-2013 under the Republic of Ireland Programme and € 323 million over the same period under the Northern Ireland Programme.

The programmes follow a broadly similar structure structured around four main Axes,

- Improving the Competitiveness of the Agriculture and Forestry Sector
- Improving the Environment and Countryside
- Improving the Quality of Life in Rural Areas and Encouraging Diversification
- Using the LEADER Programme/type approach

Interestingly under the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programmes some measures have stated that they will prioritise projects which ‘impact positively on anti-poverty measures in rural areas’, it remains to be seen how rigorously this prioritisation has been implemented given that it is just one of four selection criteria.

Both programmes have a clear impact on rural communities particularly in relation to the Quality of life and the LEADER axes. Neither programme places much emphasis on the alleviation of poverty or reference to exclusion. The emphasis in the Irish Plan is on ‘vulnerable groups’, ‘stages of the lifecycle’, and ‘communities’—irrespective of rural or urban location. The lack of consideration of how these Programmes could practically contribute to tackling poverty and exclusion is a key gap. There is clearly a need for a more multi-sectoral and coordinated approach to combating poverty and social exclusion particularly as research has shown that at a local level (NUTS 4) higher levels of poverty are very closely linked to with the nature of economic activity, small-scale farming, economic and age dependency, social class and household composition.

3.4.2 National Rural focused policies that impact on rural communities.

Approval for the development of Northern Ireland’s first Rural White Paper was given by the Northern Ireland Executive in July 2009. The purpose of this paper is to set out a long-term strategic vision for the development of rural areas throughout the region. The paper is due to be published shortly. The Republic of Ireland 1999 White Paper on Rural Development in contrast is significantly out of date. It is a useful reference document in that it defines the rural development policy agenda as encompassing all Government interventions across an inclusive designation of rural (all areas outside of the five major urban areas, approx 59% of the population). This inclusive definition and vision of dispersed rural population advocated by both the White Paper and the 2001 Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland although presenting challenges from an environmental perspective, may provide an alternative rural model that can feed into the widely accepted concept of ‘balanced regional development’ with a focus on tackling rural poverty.

4. Key Challenges

4.1 Introduction

Tackling poverty and exclusion in the highly complex, non-homogeneous groupings that are rural communities, is a complex task. Further complicated by the fact that rural communities and rural areas survival and development in a globalised economy is increasingly associated with their evolving relationships with neighbouring urban centres and regions as well as what Jackson⁴³ refers to as a complex interplay of '*economic, social, political and environmental*' factors' that need to be factored into solutions.

Poverty and social exclusion clearly manifest themselves very differently in rural communities than they do in urban communities and therefore require different and specific responses. There are a number of core challenges to be addressed if rural poverty and social exclusion are to be tackled in a more effective and strategic way as follows.

4.2 New and Emerging Challenges

Among the most serious challenges facing rural communities are rising levels of unemployment (unemployment rates in rural areas are above the national average) and the maintenance of key local services (both public and private) as well as continued investment in the key social and infrastructure development that is required to enable rural areas and communities reach their full potential

Tackling High Unemployment levels

There is a need for re-skilling and re-training of unemployed and under employed individuals. There is also a challenge to create new diversified types of local employment in rural areas. One option in relation to the creation of new employment opportunities is the further development of the smart/green economy which seeks to harness the renewable energy potential of our rural areas. There may also be scope for the creation of further additional employment opportunities in relation to the sustainable use of our local natural resources for food production, forestry, fisheries and tourism. There may also be scope to development knowledge-based or creative sectors, which are not location-critical in rural areas. The development of these types of strategies will require public and private investment and support, e.g. investment in new electricity grids and higher speed and more reliable rural broadband networks. The development of local rural employment opportunities is critical in terms of achieving the critical mass of people necessary to sustain services and justify and support infrastructural provision.

Key Services

The maintenance of key local services will necessitate the prioritisation and enhanced co-ordination of existing services, difficult decisions will have to be made. Spatial and economic development strategies linked to capital investment programmes provide a method for the enhanced co-ordination of sectoral policies linked to key service areas including rural transport, housing and health provision. These spatial strategies to be effective from a rural perspective need however to be clearly linked to our vision of how we want rural communities to be. From a Republic of Ireland perspective implementation of the priorities identified for rural areas in the

⁴³ Jackson, T (2009) '*Prosperity without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet*' Sustainable development Commission (UK)

recent Review of the National Spatial Strategy (p45) could provide a useful contribution to addressing some of the challenges associated with employment and service provision in rural areas. The priorities include:

1. Development of a pilot rural retraining/re-skilling initiative with the relevant state training and education providers in one rural area for wider application after an initial trial period;
2. A pilot Market Towns Initiative in up to three local authority areas developed jointly between the relevant Departments / Agencies and local authorities and aimed at showing how concerted action in planning, investment, marketing and economic diversification can contribute to the diversification and renewal of small towns and villages;
3. Identification of ways to develop outreach research and commercialisation schemes aimed at maximising the development of a vibrant and creative rural micro-enterprise culture in conjunction with the relevant Departments and Agencies and regional authorities; and
4. Provision of necessary infrastructure in rural areas such as improved water supplies,

The challenge is to ensure that there is ongoing collective representation by the community and voluntary sector of the needs of the poor and excluded in rural communities.

4.3 Enhancing Collaboration & Representation of Rural Poverty & Exclusion

Raising levels of awareness of the existence and nature of rural poverty and exclusion and of the solutions necessary to tackle these issues requires a) a level of sensitivity to the specifics of rurality, b) an understanding of the multidimensionality of processes and outcomes impacting on rural areas and communities, and a) a structured if eclectic set of approaches to tackle these issues. This work requires collaboration at all levels (national, regional and local). This collaboration must involve key decision makers (at the different levels) and those who represent the interests of the poor and the excluded in rural communities.

There is a clear need for enhanced levels of cooperation involving the various community and voluntary organisations who seek to represent the interests of poor and excluded rural communities. At a local level the strong sense of rural as a place and as a distinct identity has in the past, been an inhibitor to communities working together. This fear needs to be overcome as communities and community organisations need to collaborate and network with one another to raise the issue of rural poverty and exclusion. There is a need for a coalition of community and voluntary organisations to come together and ensure the rural poverty and social inclusion agenda is effectively represented at all levels of decision making. The UK based Commission for Rural Communities⁴⁴ '10 big numbers initiative' is an example of a relatively low cost initiative that has been adopted and used by a number of representative organisations. Organisations that represent the interests of the excluded in rural areas also need to actively encourage local groups to seek participation from people that have recently come to live in rural areas, thus avoiding the exclusion of any particular group or interest.

⁴⁴ See <http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk> for details.

4.4 Support for Better Integration between Policies

4.6.1 The Need for Better Integration between Policies

*'Relations between government departments, public agencies and local authorities are characterised by a mix of strong and weak hierarchical links with limited horizontal or networked linkages at national, regional or local levels'*⁴⁵

The plethora of policies that affect rural communities and to a greater or lesser extent rural poverty and exclusion mean that there is a clear for integration of polices at both a national and a local level. The reality is that there is a general lack of connection (both horizontal and/or vertical) between different policies and strategies. Horizontal connections between national policies where they exist tend to be weak, with one or two exceptions. A link was for example made between spatial policy and the capital investment allocation advanced in the Republic of Ireland through the 2007-2013 National Development Plan.

The challenge is to support and facilitate enhanced horizontal and vertical co-ordination and integration between policies that affect socially excluded groups in rural communities

Vertical connections between national policy and local policy and practice are also limited. Connections where they do exist rarely extend beyond routine references, signposting and name-checking of key policy documents. The limited nature of dedicated policies to tackle rural poverty or social exclusion (with the exception of the forthcoming publication of the Northern Irish Rural Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework) clearly reinforce the need for the better integration of policies from a rural poverty and social inclusion perspective. This type of integration work will require significant changes in organisational and governance cultures as well as changes in resource allocation mechanisms.

4.6.2 Supporting integration of a) rural & b) rural poverty and social inclusion issues in wider policies

A number of possibilities exist in terms of integrating rural and rural poverty and social inclusion issues in wider policy frameworks. One option would be to revitalize the process of rural proofing. Rural proofing was to have been the mechanism that would ensure that the impact of policies on rural areas/communities was considered in a structured way, while poverty impact assessment (poverty proofing) was to have been the vehicle to enable the assessment of policy impact. The absence of adequate resourcing for both of these activities and

The challenge is support better integration of rural development and social inclusion policies at all levels

⁴⁵ Walsh, C (2010) Spatial Planning and Capital Investment prioritisation: Co-ordinated Regional Governance but how? Irelandafternama blog . October 8th 2010. <http://irelandafternama.wordpress.com>

the lack of a legislative requirement to undertake these processes has meant that rural proofing in particular became something of a tick box exercise. Resources have been made available to continue to support limited application of the poverty impact assessment process but it is unclear to what extent this process considers the unique and distinct aspects of rural poverty and exclusion.

Another option would be to apply the principle of 'positive duty' to ensure a rural inclusion focus within mainstream policies/practice. Another possible vehicle in the Republic of Ireland for progressing this work from a rural poverty and social inclusion perspective would be the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development and the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion. While at a local level the Social Inclusion Measures groups (under the auspices of the County/City Development Board) provide a local fora that could also be used to support greater levels of local policy co-ordination and integration, their potential has however yet to be fully realised. While the fourth and final option would be to ensure that the process of poverty impact assessment is enlarged to take adequate cognisance of the unique characteristics of rural poverty and social exclusion.

The impact of national strategies could also be enhanced across the island from a general rural perspective if closer linkages were drawn between targeted sectoral and spatial policies and programmes, at both a national, but particularly at regional level, with oversight at a national level. This approach was advocated in the Cork Declaration⁴⁶ in 1996, the OECD in 2007⁴⁷ and most recently in an Irish context by the Western Development Commission in their very useful policy briefing on a new approach to the regions policy⁴⁸. This newer approach to regional policy focuses on regions achieving their potential, and recognises that less developed regions can have greater unfulfilled potential. Enhancing regional policy would also be beneficial in terms of providing a unique mechanism to consider rural issues and challenges in the context of urban issues an important and useful development given the complementarities and dependencies that exist within regions.

4.5 Building a Future Together

Work also needs to continue on building a shared future across the island. Tackling sectarianism and racism and building enhanced relationships between communities needs a vision and a direction across the island (not just in Northern Ireland and the border counties). A draft Programme for Cohesion, Sharing & Integration was produced in Northern Ireland in July 2010. The Irish National Action Plan against Racism was completed in 2008 while more recent 'Migration Nation' does not have a clear status.

Work on the building of a share future and on the development of connections between policies on a cross border basis could be supported through the establishment of the North South Consultative Forum (agreed under the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (1998) and the St. Andrews Agreement (2006). The Forum would provide a useful mechanism to facilitate government and civil society meeting on a cross border basis to discuss shared challenges including rural poverty and exclusion.

⁴⁶ Cork Declaration: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rur/cork_en.htm

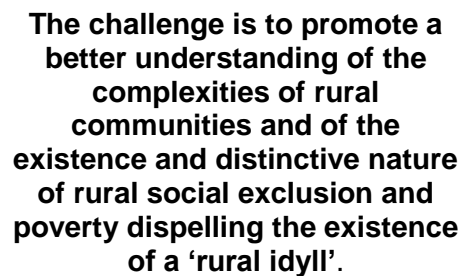
⁴⁷ OECD (2007) *New Rural Paradigm*. Paris

⁴⁸Western Development Commission (2010) *Why Care About Regions? A New Approach to Regional Policy*, Policy Briefing Paper, WDC

4.6 Better understanding and measures of rural poverty and social exclusion

Building a better understanding of the complexities of rural communities and of the existence and distinctive nature of rural social exclusion and poverty is difficult because rural poverty and social exclusion by their nature are more dispersed, less visible and difficult to measure accurately. Individuals and families can be reluctant to admit that there are difficulties, which in turn makes it difficult to identify and measure. Measuring rural poverty and social exclusion requires a combination of different types of data, to be drawn from a variety of different sources. Current poverty and deprivation measures do not adequately measure rural poverty or exclusion and need to be refined future to reflect the specific dimensions of rural poverty and exclusion. It is not probably not surprising therefore to find that the Eurostat 2010 report⁴⁹ 'Combating poverty and social exclusion' which provides a detailed statistical portrait of the European Union in 2010 makes only one very fleeting reference to the rural context. In the same way at a national level while the recent review⁵⁰ of the National Spatial Strategy makes reference to the 'delivery of sustainable communities', it only refers to 'disadvantaged urban areas' and makes no reference to rural disadvantage, poverty or exclusion. The rural perspective is instead referred to in the context of '*Harnessing the potential of rural area*, 'to develop productive local economies and to deliver sustainable energy alternatives towards a less carbon intensive economy' (p8)

The prevalence of the 'rural idyll' image of rural communities, coupled with the lack of visible manifestation and complexities associated with its measurement together with the lack of a strong coherent voice to represent rural poverty and social exclusion issues at policy level has meant that these issues have not had the recognition necessary to make them a significant political priority. There is a need for more data to be made available on the subject and for promotion of a greater level of understanding at national and regional level in particular of the issues of poverty and social exclusion that exist in rural communities, as well as a commitment to their resolution. The UK Commission for Rural Communities 'Ten Big Numbers Campaign'⁵¹ is an example of how the issue could be highlighted in a co-ordinated and strategic way.



The challenge is to promote a better understanding of the complexities of rural communities and of the existence and distinctive nature of rural social exclusion and poverty dispelling the existence of a 'rural idyll'.

Another idea that could be adopted would be the identification of national level rural poverty and social exclusion spokespeople. This would mirror the appointment across the EU of what were called national Ambassadors⁵² for the 2010 European Year for Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (EU Year 2010). The role of the national rural poverty and social exclusion spokespeople would be similar to that of the national ambassadors - to raise awareness of the extent and nature of rural poverty and exclusion issues at a national level.

⁴⁹ Eurostat (2010) *Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: A Statistical Portrait of the European Union 2010*. Brussels:


⁵⁰ Government of Ireland (2010) Review of the National Spatial Strategy

⁵¹ See <http://ruralcommunities.gov.uk/2009/11/17/10-big-numbers-november-2009/> for details of the 10 big numbers campaign

⁵² See <http://www.2010againstpoverty.eu/ambassadors/?langid=en> for details of the Ambassadors appointed. No national ambassadors were appointed in the Republic of Ireland, while two were appointed for the United Kingdom

4.7 The Need for a Clear Vision for our Rural Communities

There is a need for a clear vision for rural areas/communities on the island of Ireland. The absence of this clear vision can be seen to be both a symptom and a cause of the rather disjointed nature of policies and programmes effecting both rural communities and rural areas. The Republic of Ireland Rural White Paper published in 1999, is too dated to be useful, while the Northern Ireland paper is due in early 2011. In the Republic of Ireland considerations of rural can be seen to have been subsumed into the debate about ‘balanced regional development’. It may indeed be that regional development (the various Regional Planning Guidelines in Ireland and the New Rural Planning Policy PPS 21 in Northern Ireland) can provide a good framework to look at the linkages and the imbalances between rural and urban areas, but the issue remains that rural areas have particular issues relating to poverty and exclusion that are different to urban areas and therefore need a focused and structured approach.



The challenge is to develop a shared overall vision of how we want our rural communities to develop into the future.

The soon to be published first dedicated Rural Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework in Northern Ireland is a very welcome development. It offers official recognition of the existence of rural poverty and exclusion and puts in place a number of strategies to tackle them across government departments. The Republic of Ireland would benefit from the development of a similar policy framework, that clearly identifies and names the poverty and social exclusion issues affecting rural communities and that puts in place clear actions and strategies for their resolution, with measurable targets and clear indicators that can be used to monitor implementation. For the more ambitious, Québec in Canada provides an example of where a specific rural policy⁵³, has been developed (separate from agricultural and economic policy). It focuses on social capital and aims to build community capacity and ensure that rural areas are occupied in a dynamic and sustainable way. This policy has been recognised ‘as one of the most advanced in the OECD area’. The success of the Quebec model highlights the value and importance of focused and integrated approaches.

The definition of rural used within the vision is important because the way in which rural is defined has the potential to impact on the scope and focus of policies concerned with the development of rural communities. Any new vision for our rural areas needs to embrace the use of definitions that include consideration of distance from service centres.

4.8 In Conclusion

This paper has been prepared to as an input the Pobal Conference “New Ideas, New Directions” on 21st October 2010. Its purpose is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the totality of issues associated with rural poverty and social exclusion. Its purpose is to stimulate debate and it is expected that additional issues will emerge as a result of the Conference. This paper is accompanied by a detailed bibliography that can be accessed on the Pobal website.

⁵³ OECD (2010) Rural Policy Reviews: Quebec, Canada. Paris

Appendix 1. Measures of Poverty and Deprivation

I. Measures of Poverty

The three most common measures of poverty are:

1. *Income poverty/relative income poverty/'at risk' poverty.* This is useful for measuring the level of inequality in a society. It measures the number of people with an income below a certain threshold (usually at 60% of the median income). The higher the figure, the bigger the gap in income levels between the rich and poor. People living below the income poverty threshold, may not be deprived of basic items, such as food or clothing. However, they are likely to be prevented from participating fully in society because of a lack of money. Relative poverty is the official EU indicator of financial poverty.
2. *Consistent poverty* helps to identify the depth of poverty and deprivation in a society. It refers to people who are both at risk of poverty (i.e. with an income below a certain threshold (usually at 60% of the median income), and are also deprived of certain items that the rest of society consider essential for a basic standard of living. The items that are used to measure deprivation (deprivation indicators) change over time to reflect prevailing income standards. Persons at risk of poverty and lacking a number of basic necessities are regarded as being in consistent poverty.
3. *Persistent poverty* measures the extent to which people remain in poverty for long periods of time and are unable to escape, or improve their circumstances. It is measured as the percentage of people living below the income poverty threshold, who have also been poor (using the same measure) in two of the previous three years.

There is an intention to rationalise and move towards a common definition of poverty based on median percentage (relative) income, deprivation indicators and unemployed households as part of the 2010 Europe 2020 strategy⁵⁴ for jobs and growth. This rationalisation would also benefit (from a rural poverty perspective) from the inclusion of some measure of access to opportunities/key services.

II. Poverty Levels

According to CSO statistics 14.4 per cent of people in the Republic of Ireland were in the 'at risk' of poverty category in 2008⁵⁵ (while 4.2% of the population were living in consistent poverty). The risk of poverty in Northern Ireland in 2008–09⁵⁶ was 21.3% (measuring incomes before housing costs), which is slightly higher than that in the rest of the UK where the rate is 18.1%.

III. Deprivation Measures

The Index of Multiple Deprivation is the most commonly used index of deprivation in Northern Ireland. The degree of deprivation in each area is assessed by 52 separate indicators relating to seven types or 'domains' of deprivation: Income, Employment, Health & Disability, Education

⁵⁴ European Commission (2010) EUROPE 2020 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. COM(2010) 2020 . This Strategy contains the first ever specific EU level target to 'lift 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion by 2020'.

⁵⁵ CSO (2009) Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2008. Stationary Office, Dublin

⁵⁶ Joyce, R., Muriel A., Phillips D, & Sibieta, L. (2010) *Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2010*. Institute for Fiscal Studies, London

Skills & Training, Proximity to Services, Living Environment, and Crime & Disorder. A weighted combination of the seven domains forms the results for the multiple deprivation measure/s produced. From a rural poverty perspective the relative weighting assigned to the proximity to services must be a critical issue. Among the most disadvantage rural areas identified in the 2010 indices were the Castlederg and Glenderg wards in Strabane Local Government District and the Crossmaglen ward in Newry and Mourne Local Government District⁵⁷.

The most commonly used index in the Republic of Ireland is the Index of Relative Affluence and Deprivation developed by Haase & Pratschke. This index using census data measures three dimensions of social disadvantage: Demographic Decline, Social Class Disadvantage and Labour Market Deprivation and then combines them to form a measure of Overall Affluence and Disadvantage. This includes a measure of rural deprivation in terms of demographic decline but data is not currently available at a significantly disaggregated level to enable a measure of proximity to services⁵⁸. The most recent 2006 Haase index found the most affluent areas of the country were distributed in concentric rings around the main population centres.

⁵⁷ NISRA (2010) The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 Report. NISRA, Belfast

⁵⁸ Hasse, T & Walsh K (2007) Measuring Rural Deprivation- Literature Review and Issues Arising. A Report to the Pobal Rural Development Advisory Committee

Appendix 2. Key Programmes that impact on Rural Communities

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<i>Jurisdiction</i>	<i>Programme Name</i>	<i>Programme Description</i>
Republic of Ireland Programmes that impact on rural communities	Local and Community Development Programme	Supports social inclusion at local level undertaken by locally-based and broadly representative companies;
	The Community Services Programme (CSP).	Supports local community activity to address disadvantage among priority target groups (e.g. elderly, people with disabilities);
Republic of Ireland Programme that have a specific rural focus	Rural Transport Programme	Supports local communities to provide innovative community-based responses to transport needs in the context of countering social exclusion.
	The Rural Social Scheme	Provides income supports to low income farmers and fishermen who in return work a certain number of hours per week for the benefit of the local community With expenditure of €214 million to be provided between 2007-2013 to benefit 2,600 households.
	The Clar programme	Providing targeted focused supports to a limited number of areas of long term population decline;
Northern Ireland Programmes that impact on rural communities Department of Social Development (DSD)	The Community Support Programme	Strengthens local communities, increases community participation and promotes social inclusion through the stimulation and support of community groups, community activity and local advice services through the provision of community centres, local advice and citizens information services, resource centres, grants to community groups and the employment of staff in district councils. Grant funding is allocated according to criteria identified in the District Council-developed Community Support Plans. The overall value of the programme across Northern Ireland for 2009-10 was £20million.
	Regional Infrastructure Programme	Supports the core costs of a small number of regional infrastructure organisations involved in playing a supporting, co-ordinating or development role in relation to voluntary and community sector organisations, particularly in those policy areas which are the responsibility of Dept of Social Development. Whilst not exclusively rural, those regional organisations have a remit for all of Northern Ireland including rural areas.
	Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (NR)	“People and Place – A strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal” is a long term (7 – 10 year) strategy which targets communities throughout Northern Ireland which experience the highest levels of deprivation. Among the 36 designated areas, 15 are located in rural towns throughout Northern Ireland. In each area, Neighbourhood Partnerships have been established to develop a Renewal strategy and Action Plan designed

		to improve the quality of life for those living in the area.
	Volunteering Strategy	This Strategy aims to align activities across government, the voluntary sector and other stakeholders to re-energise and increase levels of volunteering. This is a regional strategy covering rural as well as urban areas and to date some 10 organisations including the Volunteer Development Agency have formed Volunteer Now, a new regional organisation.
	Welfare Rights Strategy	This strategy focuses on citizens' information and advice is being considered by government with a view to developing a more cohesive approach to provision of support to civil society. Provision of advice services to rural areas which experience disadvantage are being addressed by urban-based centres offering outreach provisions through collaboration with community-based organisations.
Northern Ireland Programmes that impact on rural communities Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)	Rural Childcare Programme	This Programme provides childcare for all children in rural areas. It aims to provide solutions that address the distinct challenges faced by rural areas in relation to the delivery of and access to rural childcare services. £1.5million was allocated to this programme in 2009 as a key priority within the Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development's (DARD) Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework.
	Rural Challenge Programme	The Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is awarding £416,000 to 90 voluntary and community based organisations under this programme. This funding will be used to enable groups implement projects aimed at tackling poverty and promoting greater inclusion in their local area.
	Rural Community Transport Partnerships	Provide travel opportunities in 95% of Northern Ireland's rural areas which greatly improves access to services for many older people in remote areas.
Other Northern Ireland Programme that impact on rural communities	Integrating Communities Programme (funded by the International Fund for Ireland)	This programme implemented by the Rural Development Council (RDC) facilitates community organisations to co operate on a cross community basis to work on issues of common interest.
	Rural Enabler Programme (funded under the Peace III Programme)	This Programme (implemented as a partnership approach between Rural Community Network, Irish Rural Link (IRL), the Department of Community, Equality & Gaeltacht Affairs (DCEGA), and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)) aims to support rural communities take steps to address conflict, racism and social inequality and in doing so overcome tensions, develop understanding and build positive relationships for the future.