

National Women's Council of Ireland

Submission to

**Ireland Rural Development
National Strategy Plan (NSP) 2007 –
2013**

January 2006

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) is a non-governmental organisation representing women's groups in Ireland. The NWCI currently has 163 member organisations affiliated to it, representing an estimated 300,000 women.

Underpinning the NWCI strategic plan¹ is an inclusive equality framework, setting out four spheres – Affective, Social/Cultural, and Economic and Political equality, each with its own rights-based goal. Working as a national representative organisation of women in Ireland, the NWCI's mission is to achieve women's equality, empowering women to work together, while recognising difference, in order to remove structural, political, economic, social/cultural and affective inequalities.

Introduction

The NWCI welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to Ireland's Rural Development Strategy Plan 2007–2013. This rural development strategy will form the basis of the future development of Ireland's rural areas and of Ireland's rural development policies. In light of this, the NWCI membership believe that it is crucial that the principles of equality and social inclusion lie at the heart of the strategy and subsequently any measures that come from the strategy. This is in line with the EU Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the EAFRD no. 7 'In its action in favour of rural development, the Community takes care to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women and non-discrimination, in accordance with the Treaty'.

Rural areas in Ireland are defined as all parts of Ireland outside the major urban areas of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. The majority of people living in rural Ireland therefore are not involved in agriculture and many are not directly dependent on the rural economy. In this submission we will show that women's contribution to farming goes largely unnoticed and unrecognised in statistics and policies. Likewise women who are living in rural areas but are not involved in agriculture are not targeted in rural development policies. **It is imperative that in the forthcoming rural development strategy these women are counted as being part of rural Ireland and specifically that women who experience poverty and social exclusion are specifically named and targeted to benefit from the development that will result from the strategy's implementation.**

Rural women's lives are as diverse as they are invisible; older women living on their own, farm widows, farm spouses, farmers, women who have spent their entire adult lives caring for their families or are currently doing so, working class women surviving on social welfare, lone parents, asylum seekers and refugees, migrant workers, women from ethnic minority groups, women operating small businesses, women in full-time, part-time or

¹ See www.nwci.ie website for further information

seasonal employment, women with disabilities and women caring for elderly parents; all have different experiences of living in rural Ireland.

Women are not mentioned in the draft strategy, however they contribute vastly to rural society through voluntary work, community development, care work, small businesses and employment. Given a rural development plan that is strategic, women could become more involved in decision making structures, have better and more secure employment, enhance their skills through training and education, create innovative small enterprises and develop their existing enterprise or return to the labour force. Rural women could also become more equal in society through measures that would structurally address the current imbalance that exists. The rural development strategy has much to offer women and in turn rural communities and the economy. **In order for this opportunity to be realised however, women must be named and targeted through specific measures in the strategy throughout axis one to four.**

As indicated in the strategy guidelines the Irish strategy needs to be integrated with the Lisbon Agenda, Goteborg Sustainability Goals and other policy commitments so that there is coherence in policy measures. Other policy documents that should provide a frame of reference and to which the Irish Government is already committed, are National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPS/incl), CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action.

Key Principles for the Rural Development Strategy Plan

The NWCI believes that Ireland's Rural Development Strategy should be embedded in the following core principles:

- 1. Promoting Equality and Social Justice**
- 2. Addressing the Information Gap**
- 3. Building Social Inclusion**
- 4. Tackling Poverty and Disadvantage**

Context

Many women who live in rural areas are excluded, marginalised and 'invisible'. The White Paper on Rural Development committee said that 'the problems of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas have a distinct impact on women. Economic dependency, isolation, unequal opportunity and participation are compounded by the problems of distance from services and amenities. The absence of an adequate transport service and affordable childcare services in many areas make it difficult for women to avail of training and education or to enter into or retain employment'².

² Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (1999), White Paper on Rural Development, Dublin: Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. See: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/index.jsp?file=publicat/wpaper/chap9.xml>

Economic Dependence

The following nation-wide statistics are reflected in rural areas and put into context women's current position in Irish society in relation to poverty, employment and women's economic dependency on men:

- In 2004, 23% of women were at risk of falling below the 60% poverty line in comparison to 18% of men (i.e. living on less than €185.28 per week)³.
- Women aged 65 and older have a 45% risk of being below the 60% poverty line in comparison to 34% of men ⁴.
- Lone parents have a 42% risk of living on an income below the 60% poverty line⁵.
- In 2004 there were 119,159 qualified adults in total in Ireland⁶. 95% of qualified adults are women (those women whose husbands are receiving social welfare income for them).
- Women are paid 14% less than men in Ireland⁷.
- The employment rate for women in Ireland in 2005 was 58% in comparison to 76.2% of men⁸.
- Just over 99% of the 544,500 people whose principle activity is looking after home/family are women⁹.

When it comes to social insurance, many farm women who work on the family farm and spouses of business owners (mainly women) are treated as 'relatives assisting'. Although working in the family business, 'relatives assisting' cannot make PRSI contributions, which would entitle them to old age contributory pension and maternity benefit. Therefore many **women who are spouses of business owners, including farming, are financially dependent on their husbands and rely on a qualified adult state pension that is approximately 70% of the full amount and it goes directly to their husbands for them.** The rural development plan needs to include measures to tackle these types of structural inequalities in Irish systems and structures.

Access to training and skills development opportunities

The need for skills development in rural areas is increasing with the need for more people to access off-farm employment. Women who have spent years

³ Central Statistics Office (2005), Women and Men in Ireland, Dublin: Stationery Office.

⁴ Central Statistics Office (2005) *ibid*.

⁵ Central Statistics Office (2005), EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions, Dublin: Stationery Office.

⁶ Department of Social and Family Affairs (2005), Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services, Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs.

⁷ Central Statistics Office (2005), *op cit*.

⁸ Central Statistics Office (2005), *op cit*.

⁹ Central Statistics Office (2005), *op cit*.

caring for children have specific needs in relation to training and education. The barriers that women face in accessing training or education can be care responsibilities, transport, eligibility criteria linked with live register requirements that they do not fulfil, costs, confidence and information. These issues can severely limit women in accessing training courses. **Given the need for skills development for many rural women and the potential benefits that it would bring to their families and communities, the rural development strategy needs to devote resources to address the barriers and enable TEAGASC and FAS to run specific courses aimed at women.** The potential for women with care responsibilities to use information technology to take part in training, run businesses or be in paid employment based in their own homes or communities is also something that should be identified and resourced in the strategy.

Employment

Women's employment rates are set to reach the Lisbon goal of 60% by 2010, however a deeper analysis shows that the proportion of women in atypical, insecure and part-time employment is significant. The aim of the rural development strategy to create better jobs for people will be fundamental to women's interaction with the labour market in rural areas. **Women's participation in the labour market correlates with ages of their children, and so any rural development strategy aimed at increasing employment for women, will have to address the childcare issues currently facing Irish parents.** In 2005, the employment rate for women aged 20–44 was 68.6%. This rate varied from 84.3% for women with no children to 55.3% for women whose youngest child was aged 3 years and under¹⁰. The Irish Government maintained in its Lisbon Agenda, National Reform Programme 2005 that a major challenge to Ireland's labour market is to foster family-friendly employment practices and support women returners. In addressing the fact that women take time out of the workforce due to caring responsibilities, (which contributes to the gender pay gap) the National Reform Programme report states that Government policy will focus on facilitating access to affordable quality childcare services for parents and to work life balance. **The Lisbon strategy goal to eliminate the gender pay gap should be central to the rural development strategy as part of its goal to increase the employment rate and create sustainable jobs in rural Ireland.**

The report of the advisory committee on the role of women in agriculture in September 2000, stated that 'resolving the issues of child and elder care and rural transport are fundamental to achieving equality and a sustainable rural economy'¹¹. They went on to recommend specific actions that could be taken to increase the involvement of women living in rural areas in the form

¹⁰ Central Statistics Office (2005), Women and Men in Ireland, Dublin: Stationery Office.

¹¹ Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (2000), Report of the Advisory Committee on the Role of Women in Agriculture, Dublin: Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. See http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/areasof/women&agri/Women_Agriculture.pdf

of socially inclusive measures. The issues discussed included training and education, information technology, participation in decision-making and social inclusion, personal finance, economic and other legal issues.

It is important that the issues as discussed in the report of the advisory committee on the role of women in agriculture¹² be acknowledged, and that the recommendations regarding training and education, information technology, participation in decision-making and social inclusion, personal finance, economic and other legal issues are included through measures under the appropriate axis. The issues will then be addressed as part of a holistic Government response to achieve the Government's commitments to Lisbon, Goteborg, CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action.

1. Promoting Equality and Social Justice

The regulations (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the EAFRD specifically highlights in Chapter III Article 8 'Equality between men and women and non-discrimination' that 'Member States and the Commission shall promote equality between men and women and shall ensure that any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation is prevented during the various stages of programme implementation. This includes the stages of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation'. **The strategy therefore needs to name this commitment specifically so that diverse groups of people will be targeted through specific measures** arising from the strategy and that any forms of discrimination existing in Ireland will be prevented.

In 1979 the Irish Government signed up to the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to commit Ireland to take action towards eliminating discrimination against women in all areas of our society. In Article 14 of the convention the Irish Government signed up to take the following action with relation to rural women¹³:

Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of

¹² Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (2000), *ibid*.

¹³ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

- (a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
- (b) To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
- (c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;
- (d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;
- (e) To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;
- (f) To participate in all community activities;
- (g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
- (h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

Emphasising the need and desirability of full equality between men and women, the Goteborg Sustainability Agreement recognises the importance of policy coherence stating that where relevant, policies must include impacts and the effects on gender equality and equal opportunities.

2. Addressing the Information Gap

The NDP Gender Equality Unit carried out an assessment in 2003 of the main gaps in information on women in agriculture. They found that the contribution of women to the farm enterprise goes largely unnoticed as a result of being 'invisible' in the official statistics such as the CSI Census of Agriculture, CSO Annual Survey of Agriculture, CSO Census of Population, CSO Quarterly National Household Survey, Teagasc National Farm Survey and other information Sources¹⁴. The study clearly demonstrated that it is not currently possible to accurately quantify the number of women in agriculture – their labour input on the farm, training and education, care work or off-farm employment. The report recommended specific changes to existing surveys to capture this data and reported that currently there is far more information on animals and crops than on farm women.

¹⁴ Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2003), Assessment of the main gaps in existing information on women in agriculture, Dublin: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. http://www.ndpgenderequality.ie/downloads/assessment_of_the_maingaps.pdf

The report found that there were some broad characteristics of farm women such as:

- Women are less likely to work full-time on the farm than men and are more likely to have some form of off-farm employment.
- Women make an important contribution to total farm household income through other sources of off-farm employment.
- Along with farm work and off-farm employment women are actively engaged in non-paid activities including care of children and voluntary work.
- Compared to other EU countries, Irish women represent a smaller proportion of farm labour, though a significantly larger proportion of full-time workers.
- There is a lack of representation of women in decision-making structures in agriculture – in the IFA women account for 6% of those in decision-making positions, which is a reflection of society as a whole. Women account for 13% of all T.D's.
- Women are involved in all levels of work on the family farm.
- Women in agriculture are usually categorised vocationally in terms of their relationship to male farmers and as non-paid family members.
- The patriarchal line of inheritance and culture of farming is responsible for much of the invisibility of farm women in society.

There are over 40,000 farm spouses contributing an average of 19 hours work on family farms each week¹⁵. Despite the fact that 64% of men farmers are married only 3% of Irish farms are made up of partnerships. Men own approximately 90% of all farms while women own the remaining 10% – half of this 10% account for women 65 years or more. When this is combined with marital status it suggests that in many cases women have gained holder status in their later years as widows.

The main issues affecting women's role in agriculture identified in the NDP Gender Equality Unit's report was the culture and tradition of a male dominated sector that perpetuates the situation of farm women being 'invisible' resulting in the fact that their role is not taken into account in developing agriculture and rural development policy.

- There is a perpetuation of traditional roles for women on farms, leading to lack of ownership, financial dependence etc.
- There is a lack of representation of farm women in off farm activities both farm and non-farm related.
- There is an expectation on farm women to be the primary carers – children, elders and neighbours.
- Attitudes of support agencies focus all support on the male farmer.
- Failure of the legal system to properly recognise the rights, roles and contribution of women to farm households.

¹⁵ Central Statistics Office (2004), Statistical Yearbook of Ireland, Dublin: Stationery Office.

Although there clearly is limited data relating to women in agriculture, there is even less available on women living in rural areas who are not linked to agriculture. This is a gap that clearly needs attention in the rural development strategy if it is to be a focussed and targeted one with clear and measurable indicators of success.

3. Building Social Inclusion

As Ireland focuses on improving competitiveness and sustainable development, measures to achieve this should target those in rural areas who are socially excluded through poverty, unemployment, lack of training and education and those who have remained outside the workforce because of caring for children or other adults.

The Community Strategic Guidelines for Strategic Development highlights the need for ‘an increased focus on forward-looking investments in people, know-how and capital in the farm and forestry sectors, on new ways of delivering win-win environmental services and on creating more and better jobs through diversification, particularly for women and young people’. In rural Ireland there are major untapped resources in terms of people who have thus far found it difficult to participate in employment, in their local communities, in business and in local decision-making structures. **The rural development strategy will give Ireland the chance to invest in local communities and in the most vulnerable people, so that the Lisbon and Goteborg aims can be achieved. It is necessary that the groups of people are named in the strategic plan and targeted through all measures under each axis of the plan.**

Support for Women’s Groups

Women’s groups and networks enhance communities through provision and facilitation of women’s community education and providing support to women. The impact that women’s groups and networks have had on the groups they support and on individual women, in particular, marginalised women, is immeasurable. ‘Tens of thousands of women, primarily in disadvantaged communities, benefit from community-based educational opportunities every year in Ireland’¹⁶.

Women’s groups and networks provide a safe place for women experiencing different forms of social exclusion to come, to learn, to build links with other women that ultimately lead to being part of a collective identity. Women’s groups and networks are managed by members and are thus driven by ‘bottom-up’ agendas. The participation of the women’s networks in local decision and policy-making fora through such groups and networks is a true route to the participation of excluded women in decision-making.

¹⁶ Aontas (2001), *At the Forefront: The Role of Women’s Community Education in Combating Poverty and Disadvantage in the Republic of Ireland*, Dublin: Aontas.

The importance of working with women in this way is underpinned by an extract from the NAPS/incl 2003–2005¹⁷:

‘Women are frequently in situations of vulnerability because they take on the main responsibility for caring for children and other family members. As a result their earnings are still, on average, significantly lower than those of men as are their employment participation rates. They form the majority of those in part-time employment and of other vulnerable groups such as lone parents and carers in the home of elderly and disabled relatives. Their longevity and relatively poor pension entitlements, based as they are on employment records, mean the many women are also at risk of poverty and social exclusion in old age’.

Women’s groups and networks frequently work with female members of other vulnerable groups singled out in the NAPS/incl – women with disabilities, older women, Traveller women, minority ethnic women and women living in isolated rural areas.

Ireland’s rural development plan needs to acknowledge the important role that community development and specifically the women’s sector, women’s groups and networks bring to rural life in increasing individuals capacity to become involved in local decision making, community education and employment. This area of rural life should be specifically included in axis three and axis four of the rural development strategy.

Migrant Women Workers

The Irish population is changing through immigration. Migrant workers are a part of rural Ireland and their contribution to rural life is important from both an economic and cultural perspective. In the twelve months leading up to census day in 2002, 76,000 persons immigrated into the State¹⁸. **In the rural development strategy, migrant workers should be named as a target group and their specific needs taken into account. The strategy should seek to eradicate any forms of exploitation of migrant workers. Their involvement in decision-making structures should also be supported.**

Asylum Seekers and Refugee Women

Asylum seekers and refugees now form a significant part of the demographic profile of many rural towns and villages in Ireland. This group includes many women parenting alone, who have lost their partners and families. Due to their situation they can be excluded from communities, although they may

¹⁷ Department of Social and Family Affairs, National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, Dublin: Department of Social and Family Affairs. (http://www.socialinclusion.ie/publications/napincl_plan%202001-03.pdf)

¹⁸ Central Statistics Office (2005), Statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2005, Dublin: Stationery Office.

be part of those communities for years and their children may know no other country. Many asylum seekers and refugees work voluntarily in communities and contribute a great deal to community life in terms of both their skills from their country of origin and culturally. **The strategy should embrace the opportunity to create more supportive and accepting communities in rural Ireland where integration is possible for all people regardless of their nationality or status.**

4. Tackling Rural Women's Poverty and Disadvantage

The Goteborg agreement on sustainable development listed six main threats to sustainable development, one of which is poverty. 'Poverty and social exclusion have enormous direct effects on individuals such as ill health, suicide, and persistent unemployment. The burden of poverty is borne disproportionately by single mothers and older women living alone'. **The Goteborg agreement stresses that cohesion policies need to target the groups in society that are most vulnerable to persistent social exclusion. As already demonstrated many women living in rural areas in Ireland are socially isolated, their contribution goes unrecognised and their potential dismissed. The rural development strategy is an opportunity to remedy this situation.**

The Irish Government signed up to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995¹⁹ which aims to 'remove all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. The action plan acknowledges that poverty is particularly acute for women living in rural households. It has a specific strategic objective that address the needs and efforts of women living in poverty'.

In adopting the agreement the Irish Government agreed to 'formulate and implement policies and programmes that enhance the access of women agricultural and fisheries producers (including subsistence farmers and producers, especially in rural areas) to financial, technical, extension and marketing services; provide access to and control of land, appropriate infrastructure and technology in order to increase women's incomes and promote household food security, especially in rural areas and, where appropriate, encourage the development of producer-owned, market-based cooperatives'. These commitments need to be borne in mind when developing the rural development strategy for Ireland.

Under the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPS/incl) all government departments and state agencies and regional and local authorities have to take anti-poverty actions into account in their policy development and programme planning.

¹⁹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/poverty.htm>

The main areas in NAPS/incl are:

- Facilitating participation in employment
- Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all
- To prevent risks of exclusion
- To help the most vulnerable i.e. women, children and young people, older people, people with disabilities, travellers, prisoners and ex-prisoners and areas marked by exclusion (urban poverty and rural disadvantage)

In their submission on the White Paper on Rural Development in 1998, the Combat Poverty Agency stated that those living in or at risk of poverty in rural areas are²⁰:

- Farmers, (particularly those on low income non-viable farms and/or engaged in non-economic enterprises) as well as those in other primary production sectors such as the fishing industry
- Those who are not property owners engaged in part-time or seasonal work
- Unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, those on low incomes, the under-employed and their dependents
- Children, particularly those living in large families and early school leavers
- Rural women
- Lone parents
- People with disabilities
- Older people, especially those living in isolated areas
- Single men living alone
- Travellers

(CPA, Submission on White Paper on Rural Development, April 1998)

The NWCI recommends that the rural development strategy include these groups as identified by the Combat Poverty Agency as target groups within all rural development strategies, programmes and policies.

In the Combat Poverty Agency 2005 research, Mapping Poverty²¹, it was found that the highest income poverty risk is found in the counties of Donegal, Leitrim and Mayo and the lowest in the counties around Dublin. The report highlighted that the key factors accounting for poverty and deprivation are socio-economic rather than spatial and that it results 'from socio-economic processes such as unemployment and low-paid work, low educational attainment, old age, child dependency and lone parenthood'. It goes on to stress that initiatives to tackle poverty must 'prioritise these structural issues'. The Irish rural development strategy should play a significant role in addressing these structural issues that keep so many

²⁰ http://www.cpa.ie/downloads/publications/Submissions/1998_Sub_WPRuralDevelopment.pdf

²¹ Combat Poverty Agency (2005), Mapping Poverty: National, Regional and County Patterns, Dublin, Combat Poverty Agency.

people in rural Ireland living in poverty. This is an opportunity to address the structural issues while supporting area-based initiatives that will positively affect people's lives in the long term.

NWCI Recommendations

The Irish rural development strategy needs to name and create targets and objectives to the social inclusion and equality goals that are in the Lisbon Agenda and Goteborg Agreement on an equal footing with the economic and employment goals, so that there is coherence in all policy measures. Other policy documents that should provide a frame of reference and to which the Irish Government is already committed to are NAPS/incl, CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action.

It is vital that the strategy acknowledges the inequalities between men and women that exist in rural communities and ensures that there are specific measures to address the structural issues that maintain the status quo; issues such as childcare, education, training and skills development, participation in decision making, social exclusion of women living in poverty and migrants and asylum seekers, economic dependence of women on men and legal issues on farms that prevent women from participating equally.

1. Promoting Equality and Social Justice:

In light of Government commitments and the rural development strategy regulations and guidelines, the Irish rural development strategy should:

- address inequalities that exist and in particular those that exist between women and men.
- ensure equal access, participation and outcomes for all.
- acknowledge a changing rural population by assuring the rights and equality for ethnic minority groups and migrants and their inclusion and involvement in measures.

2. Addressing the Information Gap:

The strategy must endeavour to fill any existing gaps in information or data on women living in rural Ireland so that a thorough picture of rural Ireland is presented. This will help to identify target groups most in need and areas and indicators of progress and development.

3. Building Social Inclusion:

The strategy should:

- link local, regional and national actions and measures involving those who will be affected by the strategy in the decision making process.
- involve the community and voluntary sector and acknowledge the importance of the community development sector, women's groups and networks to rural Ireland.
- include those living in social exclusion because of poverty, unemployment, economic dependence, ethnic differences, physical isolation or any other reason in measures in the strategy to increase their involvement in rural Ireland.
- recognise the needs of those who are most disadvantaged and experience most difficulties in getting involved in community life and enable them to participate in the development of their areas.

