

DRAFT

RURAL ANTI-POVERTY / SOCIAL INCLUSION FRAMEWORK

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Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. An Analysis of Poverty and Social Exclusion	6
3. Summary of the Research findings	12
4. Strategic / policy context	
a. DARD context	19
b. Strategic context	22
c. Cross border context	25
5. Horizontal Principles	27
6. Key Objectives of the Framework	30
7. Programme for Anti Poverty/Social Exclusion	
Fuel Poverty	32
Rural Transport and Access	34
Rural Childcare	35
Rural Anti Poverty/Social Inclusion	
Challenge Programme	37
Community Development	40
8. Summary	43
Annex A Consultation Questions	44

1. Introduction

As part of the Programme for Government, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has been allocated £10m for actions to address rural poverty and social exclusion across the budget years 08/09-10/11.

This work is especially relevant in the current economic climate. Falling house prices coupled with increasing food and fuel prices are putting an even greater pressure on society. These pressures can often be exacerbated in rural areas resulting in increasing numbers of rural people finding themselves in positions of poverty and exclusion.

A key goal of DARD is to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas. The key instrument used to contribute to achievement of this goal is the Rural Development Programme that will run from 2007-2013. This programme aims to create more sustainable businesses and jobs, support projects that will enhance the quality of life of local communities and support strong community infrastructures. However, there are some limitations to the types of projects and actions that this programme can support.

Furthermore, although there is a range of current interventions in respect of addressing poverty and exclusion that are administered by other government departments, stakeholders continue to raise concerns about lack of access to services as a problem for rural areas, thus compounding poverty and feelings of exclusion.

This framework seeks to identify where gaps exist in the fight against poverty and exclusion in rural areas, and sets out how they might be addressed through innovative, partnership led approaches with other government departments and stakeholders.

In order to develop an effective programme that targets the key issues facing rural communities the Department commissioned two pieces of work from rural stakeholders, namely: “Defining Rural Poverty: An Issues Based Approach” by the Rural Community Network; and, “Challenging the Rural Idyll: Rural Poverty and Social Exclusion, Priorities for Action” by the Rural Development Council.

The Rural Community Network report included contributions from

a range of stakeholders including Help the Aged, Age Concern, NI Rural Womens Network (NIRWN), Disability Action, Ulster Farmers Union, Carers NI and the Community Relations Council.

Discussions were held and input received from a range of sources including the Ulster Farmer's Union, NI Agricultural Producers Association, Rural Support Networks, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the NI Anti Poverty Network, Energy Savings Trust, Southern Investing for Health and Homestart.

A number of key issues affecting rural areas were raised again and again by stakeholders. They included childcare, transport, fuel poverty, community development, support for farm families, general financial poverty and social exclusion.

DARD met with a range of government departments to discuss the issue of rural poverty and exclusion and examine ways of ensuring that there was a joined up and informed approach to addressing rural poverty and exclusion. Discussions were held with the Department of Social Development on fuel poverty and community development support, the Department of Regional Development on transport issues, the Department of Education on provision of childcare, the Department of Health and Social Services on family support and OFMDFM on the collective approach to addressing poverty and exclusion. These proposals have therefore been developed in conjunction with other government departments who support the rural dimension to addressing poverty and exclusion through this framework.

Consultation with the Agriculture and Rural Development Assembly committee also helped to inform this framework of actions and activities to address rural poverty and social exclusion.

In summary, the overall objective of this framework is to;

- provide mechanisms and support to those living in rural communities to identify and tackle poverty and social exclusion in their areas; and
- provide access to the necessary tools and support to address these concerns in a sustainable manner.

The anticipated outputs arising from this framework are a contribution to the elimination of poverty in rural areas and assurance that all actions taken in rural areas are fully inclusive of the population.

2. *An Analysis of Poverty and Social Exclusion*

Definition of “Rural”

There is no single definition of what is meant by the term “rural”. In an attempt to address this issue, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) published a Report¹ by the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group in February 2005 which considered this question in depth. The report recommended that Government Departments and other users should consider defining urban and rural areas in ways that are appropriate for the specific programmes and projects under consideration. In the absence of a programme-specific definition, it proposes that settlements with a population of 4,500 or less should be defined as rural.

On the basis of this definition, approximately 65% of the 1.7 million inhabitants live in urban areas and 35% (588,651 as per 2001 census) in rural areas. However, the report stresses that this definition should not be used in a prescriptive way and that policy makers need to consider the appropriateness of settlement and urban/rural classifications to individual policies.

This definition (and population limit) is currently used by the 2007-13 Rural Development Programme. In relation to this framework, unless stated otherwise, this settlements-based definition of a population of 4,500 outlined above will be used.

¹ Report of the Inter-Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group: Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, NISRA, February 2005

According to the “Households Below Average Income Report 2005/06” report published by the Department of Social Development² one in five individuals (21%) lived in poor households, i.e. households with an income less than 60% of the 2005/6 median (363,000 individuals). For the UK as a whole 18% of individuals lived in poor households. The EU survey on income and living conditions 2006 recorded that 17% of households in the south were considered to be at risk of poverty – the urban/rural split is 14.3% and 21.5% respectively.

When the DSD figures were broken down further it was found that;

For children in 2005/06:	25% live in poor households (108,000)
For working age adults in 2005/06:	17% live in poor households (172,000)
For pensioners in 2006/06:	28% live in poor households (74,000).

When the urban/rural classification is applied, it was found that for individuals, after meeting housing costs, there is an East/West dimension to the risk of poverty, with the **Rural and Urban West** having the highest risk of poverty³, (24% in both areas). This compares to 20% of individuals at risk of poverty in the Rural East, 16% in the Urban East and 19% in the Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area. When housing costs are not taken into account **rural areas** have the highest risk of poverty for working age adults (20%) compared to 16% for urban areas. This trend continues after housing costs are taken into account with the risk remaining at 20% of working age adults in rural areas compared to 18% in urban areas.

The risk of pensioner poverty on a before housing cost basis is highest in the Rural East and Rural West at 33% and 37% respectively, however this reduces when the after housing cost

² Households Below Average Income Report 2005/06” report - An analysis of the income distribution in Northern Ireland, Department of Social Development²

³ Risk of poverty is defined as the percentage of people that live in households experiencing relative income poverty. A household is in relative income property if the income is less than 60% of the UK median.

basis is applied. This is due largely because pensioners tend to not rent and have paid off their mortgages.

When all individuals in poverty are taken into account, the Households Below Average Income report published by DSD for 2005/06 noted that rural areas comprise the highest proportion of individuals living in poor households (38%).

Fuel Poverty –Fuel poverty is defined as where an individual household has to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to heat its home and is an example of an issue that is more pronounced in a rural setting. Prices of individual fuels are higher here than in GB and this is compounded by the fact that many households here face a restricted choice of fuels and are therefore not able to use the cheapest. This is more pronounced in rural areas as there is less access to alternative fuels such as piped gas.

As a result the problem of fuel poverty is more widespread here than in England: in 2004, 24 % of homes here were suffering from this condition compared with 9% in the North east of England and Yorkshire (the worst of the English regions)⁴. The Combat Poverty Agency estimated that in 2004 17% of households in the south suffered fuel poverty.

Almost half (42.9%)⁵ of the households living in isolated rural areas were in fuel poverty according to work carried out by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 2006. The unprecedented rise in the cost of living, in particular the large increases in the cost of fuel over the past two years, means that the current fuel poverty situation will have significantly worsened, thus requiring immediate action in order to support the increasing number of people who now find themselves in a fuel poverty situation.

Child poverty – In the UK, the main measure of child poverty is an income measure, setting a poverty threshold of 60% of the median income of all households⁶. If a household income is less than this threshold, the family is considered to be in poverty. According to the Department of Social Development's "Households Below

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation "Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland, 2006" Kenway, P., MacInnes, T., Kelly, A., Palmer, G.

⁵ NIHE, Interim House Condition Survey, 2006

⁶ DSD, Households Below Average Income NI Report 2005- 2006

Average Income Survey 2005 – 2006”, 25% of children here live in poor households (108,000 children). Of this the Rural and Urban west have the highest percentage of children living in relative income poverty i.e. 31% of children in the rural west live in households experiencing relative income poverty.

The RCN⁷ reported that in terms of child poverty rates at District Council level a total of 14 of the 26 District Council areas had child poverty rates (after housing costs) that were higher than the average of 24%. Of these 14 councils with above average rates of child poverty 12 would have significant rural territory and residents. In the south the Combat Poverty Agency reported that in 2006 20% of children were of risk of poverty.

Social Exclusion - OFMDFM’s Lifetime Opportunities strategy clarifies social exclusion as an inability to lead what is considered a normal life, due to the severe problems encountered by the individual. Social exclusion can be attributed to direct causes, for example poverty, employment, fuel costs, cost of living and debt. Alongside these are contributory factors which result from or are linked to causative factors such as lack of access to education, health indicators and housing.

Providing evidence of social exclusion has been noted to be difficult, particularly in identifying individuals who cannot or do not wish to be part of the wider society and often social exclusion has been linked primarily to poverty measures. This does not then reflect the position of those who are not in poverty but who cannot enter society due to other reasons.

However, social exclusion and poverty do tend to go hand in hand, particularly for those individuals and families who suffer from multiple social problems. They may be low skilled, unemployed, have a low income and be coping with difficult home circumstances. They might live in poor housing or in areas blighted by crime. Those living in rural areas may have difficulties in accessing the types of services that other people take for granted.

While poverty and employment are major factors people can be cut off from society for a number of reasons, i.e. discrimination,

⁷ RCN “Defining Rural Poverty – An Issues Based Approach, 2008

disability, mental illness, lifestyle choice or a member of a particular minority. Lifetime Opportunities reports that measures to address social exclusion need to target the causes of exclusion.

In rural areas, exclusion is a key concern of the elderly. The RCN's "Ageing and Rural Poverty" research report (2004) reported that 71% of older people regarded access to public transport as a key disadvantage for older people living in a rural community. 69% reported that isolation was a key disadvantage.

Isolation is also a big issue for the disabled in rural areas. People can experience problems with access and mobility which can make it difficult to interact socially and carry out everyday tasks such as banking and shopping.

The NI Rural Women's Network have also highlighted the barriers that rural women face such as lack of access to childcare facilities, poor transport infrastructure, lack of access to employment possibilities. Rural women also constitute a less mobile workforce compared to men, mainly reflecting childcare responsibilities⁸.

As the demographics of our rural areas change, so do the types of exclusion. As increasing numbers of ethnic minorities settle in rural areas, they may find barriers to inclusion in terms of language and culture.

OFMDFM's Lifetime Opportunities strategy notes that while poverty and multiple deprivation tend to be concentrated in urban areas, pressures on the agricultural sector, demographic change and the physical isolation leave many in rural communities in or at serious risk of poverty and social exclusion. The strategy states that the challenge and priority is to build a strong rural community infrastructure which will help provide economic and social opportunities for everyone, but in particular for young people who want to live and work in the countryside.

Farmers and Farm Families - Farmers in Northern Ireland are experiencing increasing levels of debt. This situation is made worse by increasing input prices (feed/fertiliser/fuel price increases) and costs of borrowing. Farming businesses have atypical financial structures in that the bulk of their assets tend to

⁸ Rural Childcare Stakeholder Group, 2008.

be fixed in nature (land, buildings and equipment). This means that should the business face cashflow problems, it can be difficult to free up capital. The long production cycles that are typical in agriculture mean that cashflow problems can easily arise, particularly in an environment of increasing input costs.

Furthermore, farmers mainly follow a lifestyle that includes long hours of solitary working combined with a tendency not to discuss financial or other stresses. They are less likely to seek medical attention. Preliminary findings from the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute Survey of Farm households (2008) show that Farm operators reported that their Av. Hrs/week on leisure activities⁹ (including voluntary organisation) equated to 2hrs 40minutes. 20% of males said that their available leisure time had decreased over the past five years.

The UFU also noted that respondents to their “Freedom to Farm”¹⁰ Survey reported average weekly hours worked on farm as 68 hours per week for full time farmers and 28 hours per week for part time farmers. These issues can therefore collectively have potentially negative effects on the well being of farmers and farm families.

⁹ (Leisure activities include, playing sport etc. watching live sport, cinema, concert, theatre or other live performance; a meal in a restaurant, cafe or pub/drink at a pub or club. Working in the garden, DIY, home maintenance or car repairs. Attending leisure activity groups such as evening classes etc Attending meetings for local groups/voluntary organisations/Doing unpaid voluntary work)

¹⁰ Freedom to Farm – The Ulster Farmers’ Union’s Vision for Rural Development in Northern Ireland, 2007 – 2013 (2006).

3. Summary of the Research findings

To ensure an effective anti poverty and social inclusion framework that targeted key areas of need, the Rural Development Council and the Rural Community Network were commissioned to undertake two separate pieces of research work.

The Rural Development Council were asked to consult stakeholders about a proposed DARD Anti Poverty Strategy and specifically to ascertain their views on:

- a. DARD's target areas for the strategy;
- b. What a rural Anti Poverty strategy should be, and what outcomes are expected?
- c. What rural constituencies should be targeted and why?
- d. What are the issues in order of priority for funding within Year 1?
- e. What impact an Anti Poverty Strategy would have on the rural community, and how it would contribute towards sustainable rural communities.

The Rural Development Council reported found that:

- 33% of pensioners living in a rural household are experiencing income poverty in comparison to 12% in Belfast and 10% in urban areas in general;
- Transport, enabling access to services, remains a key issue for rural people with only 20% of rural households are within 13 minutes of a bus stop;
- availability of services remain a key issue- an increasing number of services are becoming centralised;
- there is a strong presence of "rural" in the top 20% of deprived wards in relation to the Noble Access to Services domain;
- It is harder to find data on sparse and remote rural areas;
- fuel poverty is a much greater problem in NI than the rest of the UK due to relatively low income and higher fuel costs;
- 6.18% of rural households are without central heating compared to 4.61% in as a whole;

- The rural west has the highest proportion of households consisting of 4 or more persons; and
- social capital¹¹ is an important means to judge how well the fabric of communities are sustaining over time.

The Rural Development Council also held consultations with rural stakeholders who. Made the following statements:

- rural poverty and social exclusion does exist;
- rural culture, including perceptions of the “rural idyll” can lead people to thinking poverty and exclusion does not exist;
- rural living is different from urban living;
- policy makers need to understand how rural works in order to better target resources to meet rural need;
- there is a need to tackle and not manage poverty;
- the gap between those who have and those who have not is getting bigger;
- issues of access and lack of information and awareness about what is available is a key barrier;
- higher costs of living (especially with the need to have a car) reduces disposable income; and
- rural people adopt coping strategies.

As a result of the research the Rural Development Council proposed that there should be four key priorities of DARD action under an anti poverty and social inclusion framework designed to tackle:

- **Access Poverty** – the research identified a lack of access to services particularly education; training; benefits and employment advice; affordable and accessible childcare; health and community services; and inadequate transport networks.
- **Financial Poverty** – there was an identified lack of alternative employment opportunities; a downturn in farming; low farm incomes; higher cost of living associated with (required) car ownership contributing to a reduced disposable income (to cover costs of fuel); lack of

¹¹ Definition : “social capital” – the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, revised)

investment in rural enterprise development; lack of awareness of entitlements.

- **Social Exclusion** – the impact of the conflict and division which affected all of society has contributed to more profound feelings of isolation and exclusion by some people living in rural areas.
- **Attitudes** – inadequate understanding of rural poverty and social exclusion making it difficult to understand how to best target resources; stigma and sense of pride *“People may often suffer in silence....many people living in rural areas do not realise they are living in poverty or are too proud to accept they are. This is particularly true of the older generation”.* (Respondent)

The Rural Community Network were asked to identify key issues and cross cutting themes in respect of rural poverty and exclusion, with a view to informing the actions that would be developed through the framework. Their study undertook to:

1. to scope existing research and statistical data relating to rural poverty and social exclusion;
2. to support expert reflection and the production of issues papers on rural poverty and exclusion issues as they related to the six Section 75 groupings as identified by DARD;
3. to support expert reflections and the production of issues papers on rural poverty and exclusion as they relate to the farming community and to wider community interests;
4. to conduct an initial analysis of papers produced identifying cross cutting themes and key issues.

The Rural Community Network has looked at 9 issues papers which address rural specific issues and trends facing the following groups:

- Older People
- Children and Young People
- Women
- Disability
- Farmers and farm families

- Wider rural community
- Migrant and ethnic minority
- Carers
- Community relations
- Community Development

These issues papers were produced by a range of rural stakeholders including Help the Aged, Age Concern, Save the Children, Northern Ireland Women's Network, Disability action, Ulster Farmers Union, Carers NI, Community Relations Council and the RCN.

The RCN report found that there is no single cause or effect of poverty but rather a number of factors which can impact in various ways. Issues such as low income and expensive childcare combine to deny opportunity to significant numbers of people within rural communities. The report also highlighted the poverty and exclusion issues that tend to relate to women, noting that those most at risk of poverty tend to be lone parents (the majority of whom are women), those with a disability, minority ethnic women and older women. The report also noted that rural areas are experiencing a growing population, an ageing rural population and an increasingly diverse rural population.

The paper also reported the following key statistics;

- the three district councils with the highest levels of fuel poverty are all rural;
- 48% of those living in isolated¹² rural areas are in fuel poverty;
- Of the 19,800 dwellings that failed the NIHEs fitness standard on grounds of disrepair, 53% were located in isolated rural areas;
- Of the 14 district councils that experienced housing affordability issues 11 had significant rural territories and populations;
- 31% of households in the rural west have adults who would like to save £10 per month but cannot afford to do so;

¹² "Isolated" in this case is defined as scattered dwellings in rural areas that lie outside the boundaries of smaller settlements (NIHE, Interim House Condition Survey, 2004)

- 31% of households in the rural west have an adult who would like to have a holiday away from home for one week per year but cannot afford to do so;
- Of the 14 district council areas with higher than average child poverty rates, 12 have significant rural territories and populations;
- 23% of children in the rural west experience child poverty;
- Of the 26 district councils, 13 have an above average proportion of working age people who are in receipt of out of work benefits. Of these 13 councils, 11 are made up of significant rural territories and populations;
- Strabane and Cookstown have the highest proportion of workers who are paid less than £7 per hour;
- Of the 13 district councils where the above average proportion of workers were low paid, 12 are made up of significant rural territories and populations; and
- Childcare provision in its availability varies massively across rural Northern Ireland. (350/1000 under 5 places in Ards down to 70/1000 under 5 places in Newry and Mourne).

Both organisations have provided evidence where they can of rural circumstances and trends. Both acknowledge that data is lacking for some areas and a more systematic approach to gathering and applying rural data is required.

Both organisations have identified more or less the same issues to be addressed and both recommended that rural community relations and a community development approach should underpin the work

Using the RDC themes and actions, and the RCN issues papers, the following possible areas of intervention could be developed:

Access Poverty

- Pilot studies on information, advice and support services – for example benefit update programmes.
- Childcare – provision of childcare as well as quality and safety issues and affordability.
- Housing unfitness – lack of access to utilities such as electricity, water, fuel.

- Education, employment – access to these opportunities tend to be less in rural areas.
- Transport – lack of access to public transport remains a rural concern

Financial Poverty

- Fuel poverty – lack of income to purchase fuel efficiently
- Ageing – addressing low incomes experienced by pensioners.
- Low incomes
- Standard of Living
- Rural ‘premium’ – additional costs associated with living in rural areas
- Benefit uptake – ensuring that those entitled to benefits are aware of this entitlement and receive access to them
- Farmers / farm families – farmers and their families are experiencing stress as a result of the long hours required and increasing input costs.

Social Exclusion

- Community development approach – utilising community development to identify and address need at a local level
- Support / carers - recognising the issues that carers experience in rural areas i.e. isolation, lack of access to services and respite.
- Disability – identifying and addressing issues faced by disabled in rural areas.
- Rural Stress – addressing mental health issues particular to rural and the sense of stigma attached.
- Active rural participation / rural community relations – addressing the hidden divisions in rural communities
- Migrant workers – recognising the changing demographic in rural and the barriers migrant workers face in terms of language and culture.

Attitudes

- Addressing ‘make do’ culture, perceptions and myths – challenging the myths of the “rural idyll”.

- Further research – exploring poverty and exclusion further and addressing the hidden problems in rural.

Interventions in the areas described would have an impact over a range of beneficiaries including Farmers and Farm Families, Older people, Single parents, Children and Young people, Disabled, Migrant and Ethnic Minorities, Rural Women and Rural Men.

4. Strategic / policy context

a. DARD strategic / policy context

DARD Strategic Plan 2006-2011

A key aim of the DARD Strategic Plan 2006 -2011 is to contribute to a successful rural economy and society. DARD views its role in this aim as helping to promote access to and provision of services, assisting rural businesses and communities and proactively working with other departments and rural stakeholders to ensure rural needs are recognised and addressed.

In particular, goal 2 of the DARD Strategic Plan is “*to strengthen the social and economic infrastructure of rural areas*”. DARD has identified strategic objectives including a joined up approach to rural policy, better access to public services and enhanced community facilities which will take account of social need with the resulting successes; more sustainable rural businesses and jobs, sustainable projects that enhance the quality of life of local communities and strong community infrastructures.

Farming continues to be a cornerstone of our rural communities, however the farming environment is changing with fewer farms being economically sustainable. A key goal of the Strategic plan is to therefore improve performance in the marketplace (goal 1). DARD aims to improve the competitiveness of our agri food industry to improve the sustainability of farm businesses.

DARD Rural Strategy 2007-2013

Key Aim 1: Creating a Rural Champion:

It is recognised that the success of rural development policy and vitality of rural communities will be influenced by the actions of all government departments, not just DARD. In this context, the department will create and develop the role of champion for the rural community in relation to access to public services and in the reflection of rural needs within broader policy initiatives. The objectives of this champion role include a joined up approach to

rural policy across government, particularly in relation to rural regeneration activities, the robust application of rural proofing and the championing of rural issues, the equitable access to public services and programmes by rural communities and the development of a robust evidence base that clearly identifies the particular social, economic and environmental needs of rural areas.

Key Aim 4: Strengthening the Social and Economic Infrastructure of Rural Areas

The department will seek to build on the successes of the 2000 – 2006 Rural Development Programme through measures designed to diversify the economic base of rural areas and enhance community capacity. The objectives of these measures will be to enhance economic opportunities in rural areas through supporting business creation and development (including farm diversification), developing the potential of tourism and encouraging the uptake of ICT and exploiting the opportunities it presents. The measures will also strengthen communities and community infrastructure through engaging with rural communities to identify and address local problems and opportunities, building community capacity and leadership, supporting village renewal initiatives and conserving and upgrading the rural heritage. These measures form part of the NI Rural Development Programme;

NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

The NI Rural Development Programme was approved by the European Commission in July 2007. This programme will deliver key elements of the DARD Rural Strategy. The programme has three key elements;

Axis 1 – improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors by supporting restructuring, development and innovation. Key measures include vocational training, adding value to agricultural products and marketing, farm modernisation and improving the supply chain. The upskilling and reskilling opportunities in this axis are a means of targeting farmers income and potential to be more competitive both within farming, or outside if that is more appropriate.

Axis 2 – improving the environment and countryside by supporting land management. Key measures include agri environment programmes and less favoured area compensation scheme.

Axis 3 – improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging the diversification of economic activity. Key measures include business creation, farm diversification, encouragement of tourism activities, support for basic services for the rural economy, village renewal and conservation/upgrading of the rural heritage.

All Axis 3 Measures will be delivered using a local delivery approach, that is, Local Action Groups (LAGs) will develop and implement local area based strategies. This type of approach to local rural development - local people providing local solutions to local problems - stimulates entrepreneurship and innovation while increasing the organisational capacity within the local communities involved.

The Axis 3 element of the programme will aim to target both poverty and social exclusion through a range of measures. Economic measures will support the diversification of the rural economy and will seek to create employment opportunities and alleviate poverty such as farm diversification, micro-businesses and tourism programmes. Quality of life measures will support communities to develop programmes that improve social cohesion and address some of the barriers that contribute to social exclusion, such as basic services for the rural community, village renewal and development and conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage.

These measures will be delivered via local strategies delivered by local action groups. It is the intention that this DARD Rural Anti Poverty and Social Exclusion framework will complement Axis 3 measures to address poverty and exclusion in rural areas and address rural poverty issues on a more regional basis.

INTERREG IV programme (Cross Border rural development)

The new INTERREG programme (INTERREG IV) will continue to focus on the strategic development of Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. For the first time, parts of Western Scotland will also be eligible for funding. The funds are targeted towards those disadvantaged rural communities that are most in

need of cross-border support. The added dimension of potential Scottish involvement will provide the opportunity for applicants to develop projects based upon shared culture and heritage.

b. Wider government strategic / policy context

Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy (Lifetime Opportunities) (OFMDFM)¹³

Lifetime Opportunities is structured around a number of general challenges which become the priorities for future policy and action. These are as follows:

- Eliminating Poverty
- Eliminating Social Exclusion
- Tackling Area Based Deprivation
- Shared Future – Shared Challenges
- Tackling Inequality in the Labour Market
- Tackling Health Inequalities
- Tackling Cycles of Deprivation

A key priority has been identified specifically in relation to rural areas, namely:

Eliminating Poverty From Rural Areas - While poverty and multiple deprivation tend to be concentrated in urban areas, pressures on the agricultural sector, demographic change and the physical isolation leave many in rural communities in or at serious risk of poverty and social exclusion. Here the challenge and priority is to build a strong rural community infrastructure which will help provide economic and social opportunities for everyone, but in particular for young people who want to live and work in the countryside.

¹³ This strategy is awaiting formal adoption by the NI Executive as per the St Andrews Agreement.

DARD is committed to this strategy through the following actions;

- provide opportunities for young children in rural areas to benefit from projects and schemes such as accessible rural transport, day care provision, crèches and initiatives that also support their parents as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life;
- provide opportunities for children and young people of all ages in rural areas to benefit from the NI Rural Development Programme through projects and schemes such as improving access to ICT and increasing accessibility through rural transport routes and positively benefiting the lives of farm families as well as seeking to improve their overall quality of life;
- By 2020, to equip farm businesses to adjust to greater trade liberalisation and help to realise the development potential of the food production, processing, fishing, forestry, horticulture, equine, amenity and leisure sectors;
- By 2015 to ensure that the needs of rural communities are met by equitable access to public services and programmes, and through programmes which enhance economic opportunities in rural areas and which strengthen and enhance their social infrastructure;
- Provide opportunities for older people in rural areas to benefit from the NI Rural Development Programme by increasing accessibility through rural transport routes;
- projects that encourage social participation and inclusion and aim to positively benefit the lives of older farmers and their families;
- By 2020 support every local authority to identify and address gaps in provision of services for each of the above groups of people in rural areas.

DARD will contribute further to Lifetime Opportunities via this Rural Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion framework.

A Shared Future (OFMDFM)¹⁴

This paper provides the policy and strategic framework for good relations.

DARD is committed to this by including good relations building outcomes in rural communities within the capacity of the NI Rural Development Programme and the Rural Support networks. Strategies submitted to Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme had to demonstrate how their needs analysis was informed by this strategy, and the programme has also set an indicator to record projects supported that encouraged good cross community relations. The inclusion of good relations building outcomes will promote inclusive activity in rural areas.

Children and Young People (OFMDFM)

The aim of this strategy is to ensure that by 2016 all our children and young people are fulfilling their potential. DARD have committed to this framework by targeting at least 5% of Axis 3 of the new EU Rural Development Programme towards projects supporting children and young people.

Racial Equality Strategy (OFMDFM)

This strategy aims to tackle inequalities and to open up opportunities for all; to eradicate racism and hate crime; and to promote good race relations. DARD is committed to this strategy by ensuring that ethnic groups are more aware of the new Rural Development Programme and understand how they will be able to submit applications to the programme.

DARD will also ensure that Delivery Agents charged with taking forward the programme place the promotion of equality at the forefront of their work. The Programme will also provide opportunities for ethnic groups and communities in rural areas to build capacity and improve their quality of life.

These actions will contribute towards alleviating ethnic minorities feelings of exclusion in rural areas.

¹⁴ This paper awaits formal adoption by the NI Executive

Positive Steps (voluntary and community sector) (DSD)

This paper aims to assist the contribution of the voluntary and community sector in addressing social need and deprivation.

DARD is committed to working with organisations with a rural remit and other government departments to establish the level of engagement by the voluntary and community sector in the delivery of rural services and related development needs for the sector and areas where cross cutting work can be taken forward.

Sustainable Development (OFMDFM)

This strategy represents the first steps towards tackling the challenges of unsustainable development that result in social problems that are exacerbated by inequalities in health, wealth, education and employment. The strategy provides a framework to achieve a better balance between social, environmental and economic progress.

DARD is committed to the Sustainable Development theme of “Sustainable Communities” that aims to promote the development of community engagement, civic leadership and responsible citizenship. DARD aims to strengthen communities and community infrastructure through: engaging with rural communities to identify and address local problems and opportunities, build community capacity and leadership, adopting a village renewal approach and conserving and upgrading the rural heritage.

c. Cross border context

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs are responsible for Rural Development actions in the south. It delivers elements of the EU Rural Development Programme, and has also developed a series of measures that address issues of poverty and exclusion in rural areas. These are regarded as National Rural Development actions.

The schemes currently operated are the **Rural Social Scheme** and the **CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais)**.

The provision of a Rural Social Scheme (RSS) was announced in the Budget of December 2003. The aims of this scheme are to provide income support for farmers and fishermen who are currently in receipt of long term Social Welfare payments, and to provide certain services of benefit to rural communities. This Scheme will allow those low-income farmers and fishermen who are unable to earn an adequate living from their farm holding/fishing, to earn a supplementary income.

The CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais) was launched in October 2001, is a targeted investment programme in rural areas. The CLÁR Programme supports physical, economic and social infrastructure in rural areas of special disadvantage across a variety of measures - such as electricity conversion, roads, water and sewerage, village, housing and schools enhancement, health, coastal and sports and community projects. CLÁR acts as a lever to elicit money from other sources through funding and co-funding arrangements with Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities.

5. Horizontal Principles

Partnership

There are opportunities for DARD to work with others in the design, delivery and funding of this framework. DARD recognises that experience and expertise on rural poverty and exclusion lies with our rural stakeholders who deal with the issues on a daily basis. Furthermore, other departments have experience of delivering anti poverty and social inclusion measures. This framework allows DARD to utilise the skills and experience that exist in these areas to ensure a targeted and effective framework that clearly identifies the key priorities for action and provides for prompt action.

Within government, opportunities exist, for example to work with the Department for Social Development on community development and fuel poverty issues, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on anti poverty and equality issues, the Department of Education on children and young people and the Department for Regional Development on transport issues.

There are also opportunities to work with organisations such as the Rural Community Network, Rural Development Council, farming unions and other non-governmental and representative organisations.

Joint funding opportunities with, for example, other Departments, NI Housing Executive, International Fund for Ireland, Local Councils, etc might also be used to maximise impact.

Complementarity

This framework complements other DARD actions in the rural development arena, notably the NI Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. The Axis 3 element of the programme aims to target both poverty and social exclusion through a range of measures. Economic measures will support the diversification of the rural economy and will seek to create employment opportunities and alleviate poverty such as farm diversification, micro-businesses

and tourism programmes. Quality of life measures will support communities to develop programmes that improve social cohesion and address some of the barriers that contribute to social exclusion, such as basic services for the rural community, village renewal and development and conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage. These measures will be delivered via local strategies delivered by local action groups.

This framework will seek to provide support for actions that may be ineligible or outside of the strategies developed by the local action groups and can complement Axis 3 measures to address poverty and exclusion in rural areas and address rural poverty issues on a more regional basis.

The framework will also seek to compliment the work of other Departments and Strategies as described, in particular ensuring that projects meet the objectives of at least one of the overarching strategies, ensuring the maximum additional contribution.

Sustainability

Building sustainable rural communities is a key aim of the DARD strategy. Actions in this framework are either designed to ensure projects are sustainable or that a suitable exit strategy is in place. The basic aim is to create sustainable development of rural communities that leaves a lasting legacy and effect on alleviating poverty and addressing social exclusion.

Equality

In delivering its Strategic Vision and Aim, the Department remains committed to promoting equality and good community relations. Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Department in carrying out all its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the following nine groups of people: persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependants and persons without.

Section 75 (2) of the Act also requires the Department in carrying out its functions to have regard to the desirability of promoting

good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Department will act in accordance with the Human Rights Act 1998 which incorporated the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention of Human Rights into domestic law.

As new policies evolve or existing policies are developed they are screened in accordance with Equality Commission guidelines. An annual Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) programme is then established from that process.

6. Key objectives of the Framework

A key driver emerging was that many of the issues raised in the research and consultation were related to a clear need for increased job opportunities in rural areas and particularly opportunities for women returning to work. To some extent the Department will seek to address this issue through elements of the new Rural Development Programme. However, intervention is needed to remove the “barriers” to these opportunities. There was a clear call for increased access to information and advice for all rural dwellers and equal access to services, including transport, education, health, information and childcare. There was also a clear call for action to address issues around fuel poverty, given the spiralling fuel costs and high levels of fuel poverty experienced by those living in rural areas. Recognising the role of community development as a mechanism for addressing poverty and exclusion was also a key factor, in particular recognising the contribution local people make in their communities on a voluntary basis to help others facing poverty and experiencing exclusion.

Based on the evidence four key areas were identified as requiring specific and immediate actions and interventions:

- Fuel Poverty
- Community Development
- Rural transport and access
- Childcare

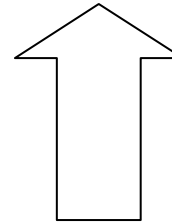
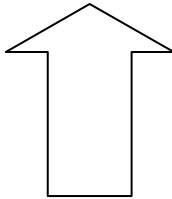
The framework will support programmes around these priorities.

However, in order to ensure that rural needs are addressed that may not fall under the key priorities above (or are not fully met within them), a further programme will be made available that will encourage local communities, farming and rural groups to identify needs unique to their area and sector and invite applications for practical solutions for anti poverty and social exclusion issues.

The framework can thus be summarised as follows;

Tackling Fuel Poverty

Developing Rural Communities

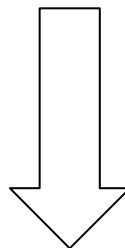
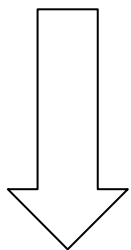


DARD Anti Poverty/ Social Inclusion Framework

Contribute towards the elimination of poverty in rural areas;

Contribute towards the reduction of social exclusion in rural areas;

Create a foundation for sustainable actions that will continue to address poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.



Improving Access To Transport

Developing Rural Childcare

Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Challenge Programme

7. Programmes for Anti Poverty/Social Inclusion

A. Fuel Poverty

Introduction

Fuel poverty is defined as where an individual household has to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to heat its home and is an example of an issue that is more pronounced in a rural setting.

Overall 4.61% of households here are without central heating though this rises to 6.18% for rural areas. Over half of all fuel poor households are found in the owner occupied sector (a higher proportion of owner occupancy is evident in rural areas). Furthermore, the 2006 Northern Ireland House Condition Survey noted that 37.7% of rural homes were in fuel poverty compared to 32.8% of urban homes. These figures have no doubt been exacerbated in the past 18 months with increasing fuel costs.

The aim of this measure is to help alleviate the impact of fuel poverty in rural areas. Fluctuating fuel costs are a consequence of global trading conditions so in order to address the problem of fuel poverty in a sustainable manner it is necessary to identify and support measures that target the energy efficiency of rural homes.

DSD currently seek to address fuel poverty via their Warm Homes Scheme. This scheme has largely been successful, however it has been noted that the programme lacks a specific focus on rural areas where fuel poverty is more pronounced. DARD will work with DSD in order to ensure more specific targeting of this scheme in rural areas.

In rural areas there is a tendency for this type of work to exceed the statutory grant level offered by DSD due to a greater proportion of rural homes to be of older stock (hence not having double walls to support cavity wall insulation). This requires alternative and more expensive means of insulation. In such cases these homes would not be able to avail of the grant because the cost would exceed the statutory grant limit available from DSD. In order to ensure that rural homes selected for this scheme are able to progress this work DARD could offer funding support above the grant limit. Intervention by DARD in this scheme has the dual effect of ensuring a more targeted rural approach by this

programme and a leveraging of funding into rural areas from another source that would not have previously been available.

Desired outcomes

Rural households provided with support to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

More effective targeting of vulnerable groups in rural areas.

B. Rural transport and access

Introduction

An academic study¹⁵ carried out for the Rural Development Council in 2003 noted that only 20% rural households are within 13 minutes of a bus stop. There is also a higher ratio of people to available cars in rural areas indicating more limited access¹⁶. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and other think tanks have highlighted lack of transport as the overriding cause of social exclusion in the countryside, particularly amongst the young, the elderly and the disabled.

In rural areas, transport is a key concern of the elderly. The RCN's "Ageing and Rural Poverty" research report (2004) reported that 71% of older people regarded access to public transport as a key disadvantage for older people living in a rural community.

Isolation is also a big issue for the disabled in rural areas. People can experience problems with access and mobility which can make it difficult to interact socially and carry out everyday tasks such as banking and shopping.

DARD has met with the Department of Regional Development to discuss the issue of access to transport in rural areas and is currently examining a range of projects that would seek to identify gaps in provision of rural transport and barriers to accessing rural transport.

Desired outcomes

Increasing number of people using Smartpass on Rural Transport Fund buses per annum.

Increasing number of journeys using the Volunteer Car scheme per annum.

Improved access to transport for those with disabilities.

Greater understanding of social impact of Rural Transport Fund to inform future policy.

¹⁵ Services in Rural Northern Ireland Report for the Rural Development Council, Greer, J., Houston, D., Murray, M and Murtagh, B (2003).

¹⁶ RDC, Striking the Balance: Towards a Vision and Principles for Education in Rural Northern Ireland: A Rural Proofing study (2005/06).

C. Rural Childcare

Introduction

There is evidence of a growing rural population including an increase in the number of families from different countries within the European Union and elsewhere.

Although there is an increase in car ownership levels, the ratio of people to cars highlights mobility issues in some rural areas. This is compounded by the fact that only 20% of rural households live within 13 minute of a bus stop. This creates difficulties when trying to access rural childcare or co-ordinate bus services with employment, training and childcare.

Rural women are more likely to work less than 30 hours per week and more likely to work within 2 km of home. They tend to be a less mobile workforce compared to males. Farm females, because of the tie to the farm business, are vulnerable to the location of off farm opportunities.

Variations exist between urban and rural provision with regard to nurseries, afterschool and crèches in particular. Training for childcare staff is predominantly located in Belfast.

Child poverty is also prevalent in rural areas. The RCN¹⁷ reported that in terms of child poverty rates at District Council level a total of 14 of the 26 District Council areas had child poverty rates (after housing costs) that were higher than the average of 24%. Of these 14 councils with above average rates of child poverty 12 would have significant rural territory and residents.

Adequate provision of childcare can be seen as having an important part to play in combating rural decline, promoting economic and social development and thus raising more children out of poverty. A recent Danish study has shown that investing in rural childcare is the most important factor above housing, transport, schools and recreational facilities for economic investment in rural areas.

¹⁷ RCN "Defining Rural Poverty – An Issues Based Approach, 2008

In order to address the issue of rural childcare, DARD established a Rural Childcare group to identify the challenges and identify solutions to the issues facing rural communities in providing adequate childcare. The group comprised a range of stakeholders from rural development, agriculture, community development, academia and childcare. The group reported back a range of findings and recommendations for all of government to address. DARD is currently developing a Rural Childcare Programme to take forward some of these actions as well as monitoring progress with the recommendations made to other government departments.

Desired outcomes

Rural Childcare Pilot/Demonstration Projects supported, creating and safeguarding childcare places

Case studies completed to inform future policy making and mainstreaming.

Coherent Executive approach to rural childcare issues

D. Rural Anti Poverty/Social Inclusion Challenge Programme

Introduction

The framework has so far identified three key anti poverty / social inclusion priorities for rural areas. However, the research and consultations with stakeholders revealed a wide range of issues that require interventions that could never be addressed through a solely prescriptive framework. This priority therefore offers the opportunity to address these wider issues in a more locally or regionally driven, project based manner.

The following information is a flavour of some of the wide range of issues and evidence presented during the development of this framework that may be addressed through this priority:

The Ulster Farmers Union cited the ongoing and increasing levels of debt experienced by farmers. Increasing input prices (grain/fertiliser/fuel price increases) and levels of farm debt/borrowing to banks and other financial institutions remains high as result of low commodity process and food scares (BSE, Foot and Mouth). These combine to have potentially negative effects on the well being of farmers and farm families.

Furthermore, farmers mainly follow a lifestyle that includes long hours of solitary working combined with a tendency not to discuss financial or other stresses. They are also less likely to seek medical attention. The UFU noted that recipients to their “Freedom to Farm”¹⁸ Survey reported average weekly hours worked on farm as 68 hours per week for full time farmers and 28 hours per week for part time farmers.

Preliminary results from the Agri Food and Biosciences Institute Survey of Farm households (2008) state that 14% of farm operators indicated that they do not take any holidays away from the farm, with a further 59% taking 7 days holiday or less in the previous year. This was attributable to not being able to take time away from the farm and cost.

The UFU highlighted the need for more training and opportunities for young people in rural areas as well as the provision of specialist

¹⁸ Freedom to Farm – The Ulster Farmers’ Union’s Vision for Rural Development in Northern Ireland, 2007 – 2013 (2006).

financial awareness training to cope with the unique business structure of farming.

All rural stakeholders raised issues around low levels of benefit uptake in rural areas for a range of reasons such as pride or low levels of knowledge about the range of benefits available to them.

The demographic of rural areas is also changing with greater numbers of migrants arriving. The 2001 Census data quantify the size of minority ethnic population here as 14,279. However, certain minority ethnic representatives have suggested that the “non-indigenous” population is now closer to 45,000 people¹⁹.

The RCN has started to examine the potential contribution of migrant workers and their families to rural communities. Some of the key observations of this research were that there is a lack of opportunity for interaction between migrants and locals, language barriers, a willingness to interact but no idea about how to go about it, prejudice and ignorance a shared reality and a recognition that migration is here to stay²⁰.

Disability Action²¹ highlighted the disadvantages that the disabled face living in rural areas, including the lack of suitable public transport, the need to ensure that they have access to information that is in a format that can easily be required and understood, and that there is a need to address education, training and employment for those suffering from disability living in rural areas.

Carers NI highlighted issues specific to carers in rural areas such as lack of services, poor access to respite or medical services and feelings of isolation and lack of knowledge of benefits and support that they would be entitled to in their role of a carer.

All stakeholders raised concerns about the effect that poverty and exclusion can have on mental health. They reported that rural areas experience a higher incidence of mental health issues such as depression and suicide as well as the stigma associated with them.

¹⁹ A Race Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2005 - 2010

²⁰ RCN, To be more than a Familiar Stranger – The challenge for Rural Sustainability (2008).

²¹ Disability Action, Disability and Poverty (March 2008)

The other priority areas will only go some way to addressing these needs. It is therefore recognised that local communities and rural groups are best placed to design practical solutions to poverty and exclusion issues in their areas.

This priority will do this by providing a Challenge Programme that will support practical proposals that can demonstrate a contribution to the alleviation of poverty and social inclusion in rural areas that are not currently met by DARD or other statutory bodies.

Desired outcomes

Projects that contribute to the alleviation poverty and social exclusion.

E Community Development

Introduction

The community development approach has delivered a number of projects that directly target issues of rural poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Examples of specific projects include Benefit Uptake schemes in Cookstown and Fermanagh, or the Rural Community Estates Programme that sought to reduce the feelings of isolation sometimes experienced by those living in isolated rural housing estates.

Community Development is an effective tool that can bring about improvements to the quality of life of citizens by giving them support to be more confident, better informed and communicative.

Community development support and promotion is a way to connect grass roots to government and vice versa. The use of a support structure allows for a meaningful connection between government and the citizen, offering a means of access and forum for exchange of information that would not otherwise exist.

Community Development is getting people involved in issues that affect their lives, supporting them to identify and tackle the local issues. In short, Community development is a strong vehicle that can underpin all actions to alleviate poverty and exclusion in rural areas.

However, by its nature, it is an ongoing process. Support is required to meet the varying needs of groups according to the stage that they are at in their life cycle, working on the basis that the level of support required is directly related to local needs and is also affected by what other support is available at the time.

The Department of Social Development (DSD) has overall responsibility for policy for the relationship between government and the voluntary and community sector and community development and has offered a range of measures to support this. They currently fund 14 regional organisations to provide community support infrastructure services including the Northern

Ireland Community and Voluntary Association (NICVA), Advice NI, Citizens Advice Bureaux, the Law Centre, the Volunteer Development Agency, Community Change and others. The development and support services offered by these organisations is available to both urban and rural groups across Northern Ireland .

DSD is currently developing their framework for post 2011 based on research, including the recommendations of the “*DSD Voluntary and Community Sector – Support Services Strategy Report February 2007*” carried out by Deloitte MCS Ltd. The development of a support services strategy will look at the provision of generic infrastructure support services for the voluntary and community sector at a sub-regional level for both urban and rural areas. These include themes like governance, training, fundraising, and strategic planning. This aims to create a more cohesive approach and ensure that local organisations have the assistance and opportunities for development that they require to be effective in their work

However, DARD recognises the need for a specific rural community development framework that recognises the uniqueness of rural and complements the community development work carried out by DSD. The factors that could be considered to differentiate rural community development challenges include;

- dispersed nature of rural communities;
- lower population density;
- access to services and activities and the impacts of this on achievement of a critical mass to move an initiative forward or to achieve comparable value for money when resources are invested to support rural community development;
- cultural differences between rural and urban communities;
- challenges such as invisible religious divisions and hidden poverty;
- experiencing increasing populations and diversity of the population;
- isolation from conventional voluntary and community support services that tend to be based in towns and cities.

These challenges support a specialised approach to rural community development requiring a clear need for a focus on the “rural” aspects of community development.

In order to effectively deliver on commitments to addressing poverty and exclusion in rural areas there is a need to ensure community involvement, capable of making decisions as owners of the projects and making effective use of resources. Central to this is the need for community groups to be able to access effective support services to develop themselves so that they have the capability to address poverty and exclusion. This includes undergoing such stages as reviewing their actions and identifying best practices. These stages will require the guidance of the support service to bring experience from outside of the community to the group either directly or by allowing the building of cross community relations. DARD would therefore be committed to ensuring there is a level of support available to community groups.

Desired outcomes

Community groups taking a prominent role in addressing anti poverty and social exclusion issues in their area.

Community groups assisting in the identification and targeting of the most vulnerable in society.

Delivery of locally tailored schemes to address anti poverty and social exclusion.

8. Summary

In summary, the overall objective of this framework is to;

- provide mechanisms and support to those living in rural communities to identify and tackle poverty and social exclusion in their areas; and
- provide access to the necessary tools and support to address these concerns in a sustainable manner.

The anticipated outcomes arising from this framework are to:

- contribute towards the elimination of poverty in rural areas;
- contribute towards the reduction of social exclusion in rural areas;
- create a foundation for sustainable actions that will continue to address poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.

This framework identifies the key issues where stakeholders feel intervention is required. It also recognises that rural poverty and social exclusion are the result of a wide range of factors and their effects can manifest themselves in different ways. In order that a spectrum of these poverty and exclusion factors can be addressed the framework also allows for local communities and rural groups to seek support to create their own solutions.

This framework will provide for support up to 2011 and will be subject to ongoing evaluation to reassess priorities and identify further interventions and actions as required.

Consultation questions on the DARD Rural Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework

1. Are the aims and objectives of this framework right?
2. Have we got the five priorities right? If not what other priorities might be appropriate?
3. What kind of projects/actions will contribute to the achievement of priorities?
4. As part of the appraisal process the budget for the framework will be considered. Do you feel each priority should have equal funding? If not how would you apportion funding to each priority?
5. How can we best monitor and evaluate the impact of this framework?
6. Have you any comments /suggestions on the rural proofing, equality impact and social exclusion aspects of this framework? (checklist's attached at Annex B/C/D)
7. What other comments would you like to make about this framework?