



**Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
Response to
Equality Impact Assessment
for the Roll-out of DARD Direct**

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a regional network established to articulate the voices of women in rural areas. It is jointly funded by Department of Agricultural and Rural Development (DARD) and Department for Social Development (DSD) under the EU BSP Programme.

NIRWN has four key objectives:

- developing weak community infrastructure in areas where little or no community based rural women's groups exist,
- increasing rural women's capacity and opportunities to influence decision-making and policy formulation,
- running Northern Ireland wide communication campaigns with a local focus, highlighting the value of rural women's contribution,
- offering a training and capacity building programme to rural women across the region.

1.2 NIRWN through its policy work strives to highlight the inequalities that rural women face. We welcome the opportunity to consider the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the roll-Out of DARD Direct.

2.0 General Comments

2.1 We welcome the acknowledgement that a key issue for rural farming women is that of not being formally recognised. However we feel that the mitigating action listed does not consider the key barrier to overcome this lack of opportunity. The current Agricultural Census reporting system only allows for one principal partner. This meant that, in the last census, 35 per cent of women who were working more than 30 hours a week on their farms were classified only as 'farmer's spouses' (Shortall and Kelly, 2001).

2.3 This skewed statistic neglects the information needs of farming women. Even though farming is mainly a family business, the male primary producer is the only recipient and user of information and services relating to primary production. This emphasis has generally ignored a large customer base.

2.3 Therefore in order to mitigate access needs, there is a necessity to carry out a piece of research to identify the information needs of farm women.

The following objectives provided for the study need to:

- Determine demographic characteristics of farm women
- Identify the information needs of farm women relating to farming and 'off farm' labour
- Ascertain the preferred communication sources of farm women for seeking information related to agricultural.

Such a piece of work would provide a statistical representation of women's roles in agricultural operations and household activities by assessing the actual extent of their work, therefore determining the access needs of women.

2.4 Research carried out by Shortall (2002) indicated that, of the regular farming activities women reported:

- 79% were feeding farm labour,
- 42% were doing farm collections and deliveries,
- 69 % were dealing with callers and ordering supplies,
- 80 % were doing farm accounts and form filling, and
- 65% were doing farming work.
- 51% of the women in the sample reported having some form of off-farm employment.

3.0 Specific comments on Section 4

3.1 Gender - does not consider the transport needs of rural women. Research has shown that rural women are less likely to have access to a car. Fawcett (2002). Mobility is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of accessing and retaining employment for working rural women. Lack of accessible transport for rural women therefore exacerbates their problems in accessing services. We would like to see this point raised under gender.

Attitudes and assumptions: It is a fair assumption that Personnel generally share the commonly-held attitudes of society that women do not contribute significantly to agriculture, but are mainly concerned with household responsibilities. DARD Personnel may not be aware of the practical constraints facing women farmers, such as lack of time due to their household responsibilities in addition to farming; restricted mobility, lack of money for transport, or inability to leave their children due to shortages in childcare.

NIRWN would advocate the need for gender awareness training for DARD staff to enable them to consider access needs from a rural women's perspective, to consider and highlight the barriers that currently exist for farming rural women.

- 3.2 Martial Status analysis did not highlight any specific adverse impacts. However it is noteworthy that typically farm women come to farming through marriage. Both this factor and a marked patrilineal line of inheritance means that women typically have less access to farming land than do men (Shortall, 1999; Alston, 1995). Land, of course, is not the only resource in farming, but it is a central resource, and one Shortall (1999) argues that enables men to gain prestige and access to other agricultural resources, such as knowledge, involvement in decision making and education and training. Shortall recognized that one of the key reasons for women's low participation rate in agricultural education programmes is due to the fact that men are property owners. Although DARD Direct Offices will not have not responsibility for training and education programmes. In the future if this service was to be offered through DARD Direct offices, it would need to be taken into consideration.
- 3.3 Given farming women's invisibility and their limited access to agricultural resources, it is not surprising to find that farm women are also disadvantaged compared with farm men in terms of their participation in the public sphere of agriculture. As far as the agricultural media is concerned the public face of farming is masculine. Women are seldom represented in the farming press, and, if at all, typically in domestic roles or supportive positions (Liepins, 1996; Shortall, 1999).
- 3.4 Dependants. We welcome DARD's suggestion to include play areas in the DARD Direct Offices. As outlined in the EQIA women are responsible for the majority of child caring responsibilities. This may encourage more farming rural women to access services directly. Also the hours of service in different areas need to consider child caring responsibilities also.

4.0 Conclusions

- 4.1 Farming rural women, as elsewhere, play multiple roles. In the domestic sphere they are household managers, mothers and wives; in the community they maintain social and cultural services, predominately on a voluntary basis; and in the economy, if they are not formally engaged as employees or entrepreneurs, they are active in family businesses and farms.
- 4.2 It is a fair assumption that gender is rarely taken into consideration in project designs and most planners, decision-makers and policy-makers within DARD have no background in gender planning. The lack of gender awareness and the absence of gender-disaggregated information have been identified as the main problems in recognizing farming women's contribution to the agricultural sector. At first glance it may seem inappropriate to gender proof agricultural policy and services, given that they are concerned with animals, seeds and vegetables. However as

Shortall (2002) rightly highlighted in Western Europe most farms are operated by farm families. It is in terms of the women and men involved in farming and living in rural areas that gender proofing becomes important. Shortall (2002).

5.0 Recommendations

5.1 Change in Agricultural Census reporting

Change in Agricultural Census reporting to allow for more than one principal partner to formally recognise the contribution of farming women. The current Agriculture Census does not reflect the actual contribution of women's work in agriculture. Inadequacies in conceptualization, definition of terms and data gathering methods result in undervaluation and underrepresentation of women's work. The Canadian Census of Agriculture was revised in 1991 to allow farm families to list multiple producers and thus allow women to be counted as agricultural producers. Until this happens farming women will not have the formal recognition and continue to be overlooked in accessing resources and information.

5.2 Collection of sex-disaggregated data

The current lack of gender-disaggregated information on the role of men and women in agricultural production impedes policy-makers and planners. It is necessary to improve the quantity and quality of information and statistical data on the economic value and output of rural women in agricultural production. In order to raise awareness of gender issues in agriculture, particularly amongst staff. Gender equality mainstreaming is a process, not an end in itself - it involves considering both men's and women's needs and experience in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies. The collection of sex-disaggregated data is a prerequisite for mainstreaming gender equality to understand how and why gender inequalities are relevant to the work at hand.

5.3 Gender awareness training for DARD Direct Staff

It is also essential to devise and implement more gender-sensitive agricultural policies, programmes and projects and to consult rural women directly in information collection and planning activities. Gender awareness training to understand the needs of farming rural women should be core to Equality training.

5.4 Transport needs of rural farming women

A point under Gender (4.6) that needs to be included is that women in rural areas have limited access to public transport services and rely more heavily on car travel. Those without cars suffer from mobility poverty. In households where there is 1 car, traditionally the man has first access to it, therefore restricting mobility of the farming rural woman. The transport

needs of farming rural women in accessing DARD Direct Offices and services, therefore need to be considered as part of the EQIA.

5.5 Family friendly practices for DARD Staff

NIRWN advocates the need for family friendly practices to accommodate DARD staff affected by the proposed changes. Child caring responsibilities mainly fall to women, therefore family friendly practices need to be central to DARDs employment policies.

5.6 Research to identify the information needs of farm women

Such a piece of work would provide a statistical representation of women's roles in agricultural operations and household activities by assessing the actual extent of their work, therefore determining the access needs of women.

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