



Community Work Ireland is the new name for the  
Community Workers' Co-operative  
Continuing to work collectively to support and  
promote community work as a means of  
addressing poverty, social exclusion and  
inequality and advancing human rights

Community Work Ireland,  
Westside Community Resource Centre  
Seamus Quirke Road Galway  
Phone: +353 (0) 87 9326467/+353 (0) 87 2998619  
Email: [info@communityworkireland.ie](mailto:info@communityworkireland.ie)  
Website: [www.communityworkireland.ie](http://www.communityworkireland.ie)

## Supporting Community Development as an Approach to Advancing the Development of Rural Areas in Ireland

### CWI Submission on the Action Plan for Rural Ireland

October 2016

#### Introduction

Established in 1981, Community Work Ireland (formerly the Community Workers' Co-operative) is the leading national organization that promotes and supports community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and ultimately as a means of achieving social change that will contribute to the creation of a more just, sustainable and equal society. CWI has in excess of 800 individual and organisational members working in and with the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland (urban, rural and issue based). Since its establishment, Community Work Ireland has been concerned to promote best practice and a commitment to social justice and inclusion in policies, programmes and measures with the remit and/or potential to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

We hope that this submission will make a positive contribution to the development of the Action Plan for Rural Ireland.

#### Community Development - Building Social Inclusion and Equality in Rural Areas

Community work or community development is an internationally recognised intervention to address disadvantage and marginalisation. It is defined as "a developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process". The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights. The process is one of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way. It is about the right and capacity of communities to have their voices heard. Community work is primarily a developmental activity that focuses on addressing the underlying causes of poverty, social exclusion and inequality and in organising collective action to address these issues. Community work/community development is based on the principles of

participation, collectivity community empowerment, social justice & Sustainable development, human rights, equality & anti-discrimination<sup>1</sup>. It is an approach to addressing significant social and economic issues for geographic or issue based communities that emphasises early intervention and the involvement, engagement and participation of those affected by these issues in the process of identifying needs and the development of strategies and projects to address these needs.

It requires a focus on identifying issues of the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities with the voice and participation of people directly experiencing these issues being central. Most crucially, in the current context outlined below, community development requires the identification by communities themselves of their own needs and of the most appropriate strategies needed to address the issues that affect them.

In Ireland, a significant grassroots community development infrastructure developed within rural, urban and issue based communities (of for example Travellers, women and migrants), supported in many instances by the State and by the European Union. However, in recent years this infrastructure has experienced significant cuts to resources and supports. In addition, the reconfiguration of the community sector has meant that many of the organisations that worked in and with the most disadvantaged communities were merged with the larger and more distant Local Development Companies.

The Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme was introduced in 2014. For various reasons<sup>2</sup> the implementation of the SICAP programme was awarded after a competitive tendering process. SICAP has resulted in significant loss to the autonomy and ability of community workers and community organisations to respond to the needs of their communities as they are 'contracted' to deliver a set of centrally designed services to a centrally prescribed number and range of targets. Community Work Ireland members working in rural areas have repeatedly stated that the SICAP programme is inhibiting the ability of local community workers and community organisations to respond to the very real needs of their communities.

In a rural context, it has long been a concern for Community Work Ireland members, that much policy in relation to rural development, has focussed predominantly on economic development in isolation from social development. Community Work Ireland members have noted that rural development policy has tended in the past to view rural populations as largely homogenous and has failed to recognise, resource and support the diversity that, while now growing, has always been a part of rural society. Migrants, Travellers, women, people with disability, carers, older people, young people, lone parents and other socially excluded members of rural populations are rarely named, rarely targeted and rarely prioritised in rural development policy and programmes. Yet all contribute to the development of Ireland's economy and to the social transformation of rural communities, both as active participants in the labour market and through family life and community activity. The issues affecting these communities more broadly in Ireland have been well documented.

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<sup>1</sup> All Ireland Standards for Community Work - <http://communityworkireland.ie/all-ireland-standards-for-community-work/>

<sup>2</sup> Please see the Community Work Ireland publication, *Exploring the Impact of Competitive Tendering and Procurement on Social Inclusion and Community Development in Ireland* for an outline of these - <http://communityworkireland.ie/in-whose-interests/>

*However one cannot but be struck on reading this document by the isolation, oppression and exclusion which characterise the lives of so many migrant women and in particular those in isolated rural areas and in poor working conditions....the particular forms of exploitation (including trafficking) violence, racism and sexism to which many migrant women are subjected. It calls upon all of us - from locally and nationally based women's groups to local development bodies, County Development Boards and State agencies, to take up the challenge to respond immediately and appropriately. (Foreword "Enabling Equality – migrant women in rural Ireland, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland 2008)*

Community Work Ireland members however note that lack of access to services, invisibility of rural poverty and lack of social networks and supports leave them in a particularly vulnerable position. Violence against women, racism against Travellers migrants and those with Irish citizenship, trafficking for forced labour and labour exploitation, loneliness, isolation, poverty, lack of options, lack of voice and powerlessness characterise the reality of the lives of thousands of people living in rural Ireland today. Any measure to promote the development of contemporary rural Ireland must recognise and take concrete action to address the needs and concerns of these communities.

*"Isolation has always been a very serious issue in rural areas. We also know from many of our members that live and work with communities in rural areas that poverty, social exclusion and inequality have deepened since the recession. These are very serious issues" (Community Work Ireland Board Member at the Launch of the LEADER Programme)*

*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.*

<http://www.nwci.ie/download/pdf/ruraldevstrat06.pdf>

Consultations with our members also highlight the bureaucracy of programmes such as LEADER and the impact this has on work and potential work with communities

*"The bureaucracy in LEADER is crazy.... Within LEADER (and other programmes), the focus (and corresponding resources) should be on animation, specifically in supporting communities to come up with a new vision of themselves and providing resources to enable this"* (CWI member

responding to request for comment on draft submission)

## Commitments for Change

A series of Government commitments of relevance to the development of the Action Plan for Rural Ireland we believe provide a useful visionary framework through which the above concerns and many others can be addressed.

*The Programme for Partnership Government* sets out the ambition of Government as being "to combine all our different talents to build a strong economy and to deliver a fair society, so that communities thrive, throughout both urban and rural Ireland" The PpPG recognises that "it is

essential that the new Government, together with the Oireachtas, puts in place measures to revitalise all of Ireland so that the benefits are felt inside every doorstep and in every community”.

*The Report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA)* sets out as a vision for rural Ireland as “vibrant, sustainable and resilient. It is a place where people can and want to live, work and raise their families. It is a dynamic source of economic growth that provides opportunities for its inhabitants. It is a place of equal opportunity where all members of the community have the chance to reach their full potential” and notes that “If rural areas are to contribute to, and participate in, national economic recovery, the potential of these areas must be efficiently, effectively and innovatively activated. This presents a significant challenge for government, the public, private and voluntary sectors, rural enterprises, rural communities and the various national agencies tasked with fostering, either directly or indirectly, rural development”.

With regard to community participation the CEDRA report notes that “Support for rural economic development rests not only with national, regional and local plans and strategies, but also comes from action on the ground in local communities.....Ireland has a strong history of community participation in development and this should be further developed through initiatives that increase the leadership development capacity and sustainable structures at a community level. Such initiatives should place particular focus on the diversity of communities in rural Ireland ensuring that support structures for different communities are adapted to their particular needs” and recommends that “The development of a programme of capacity building for rural communities....Such a capacity building programme should include support for leadership and governance training, for development of community structures and participative planning, as well as support for specific training initiatives” (Recommendation 12).

*The LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020* Rural Development Policy is a core element of the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy, delivered through national Rural Development Programmes RDPs. LEADER is a key funding pillar supporting the implementation of RDPs through the delivery of local development actions in rural communities.

Given the fact that LEADER in Ireland will be programmed under Priority 6: Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas providing a welcome focus on social inclusion. Marginalised communities or 'hard to reach' communities, including Travellers, Roma, migrants, women, people with disabilities, are a priority along with rural young people. The new LEADER programme recognises that basic supports and services are required to address the inequalities they experience.’ In order for LEADER to reach its potential as a dynamic force for the advancement of social cohesion in rural Ireland, it is our view that initiatives under the programme must address social goals as well as economic and environmental ones.

Community Work Ireland have submitted that the programme must therefore be outcome-focused primarily with a view to achieving community, economic and social empowerment and promote a more inclusive and fairer rural Ireland. This requires performance based indicators that clearly show that Local Action Groups are using the LEADER strategies to make a difference for all people in rural Ireland.

*The Charter for Rural Ireland* (published in January 2016) is a statement of Government commitment to support Rural Ireland’s regeneration and to underpin the future sustainable

development of Ireland's rural communities. The Charter notes that "Full participation of rural communities in decision-making which impacts on them will be supported and encouraged. This will be aimed at ensuring that the people who live and work in rural Ireland are heard and considered at all stages of policy making and implementation" and notes that "This will not only facilitate a better quality of life for those that live in our rural communities but will also ensure that the rural economy and society is facilitated in maximising its contribution to the sustainability of Irish society as a whole. It is vital that the development of rural areas should encompass wider social and environmental considerations as well as economic issues".

*The Sustainable Development Goals* in September 2015, Ireland, along with 192 other states at the United Nations, agreed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to guide local, national and global efforts towards social inclusion, gender equality, environmental protection, action on climate change and several other issues. Over the next fifteen years, all countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection. While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals<sup>3</sup>.

*Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty* The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, provides for the introduction of a public sector equality and human rights duty<sup>4</sup>. Public sector equality and/or human rights duties require public bodies to take proactive steps to actively promote equality, protect human rights and combat discrimination having regard to all of their functions and powers. They are, therefore, aimed at going beyond simply avoiding potentially discriminatory acts against employees and service users. In the case of the new Irish duty, public bodies are required to consider how they will advance equality for the groups protected under equality legislation and how they will protect the human rights of all citizens in regard to the human rights obligations in the Constitution and in domestic legislation. Such a duty requires public bodies to consider the human rights and equality impact of their policies, services, procedures and practice and to ensure that the promotion of equality and human rights becomes a core part of the way in which the organisation operates and conducts its business, rather than an add-on or a reaction to incidents of discrimination or human rights violations that arise<sup>5</sup>.

### A strategy for Realisation

Community Work Ireland suggests that;

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

<sup>4</sup> Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 S42

<sup>5</sup> A New Public Sector Equality & Human Rights Duty Paper 3 of series: Setting Standards for the Irish Equality and Human Rights Infrastructure Equality and Rights alliance March 2015

<http://www.eracampaign.org/uploads/A%20New%20Public%20Sector%20Duty%20March%202015.pdf>

1. Realisation of the above commitments requires a recognition of the importance of community development in the rural development process and further suggests that the Action Plan for Rural Ireland supports the establishment of a distinct community development programme to support community work in rural areas throughout Ireland. This should be underpinned by the following:
  - A community analysis of need in rural areas and strategies to address those needs;
  - A strategic planning exercise that is based on this analysis that will establish goals for the work;
  - A level of resources and support for the work that will facilitate and enable the goals to be achieved – based on a grant arrangement;
  - Implementation of the programme by community-based organisations that have a history of working in the area;
  - The programme should be designed in a manner that ensures that work at local level is based on locally directed needs analyses and underpinned by community work principles as outlined in the *All Ireland Standards for Community Work*:
    - Collectivity – collectivity includes collective analysis, collective action and collective outcomes in pursuit of a just and equal society;
    - Empowerment - community work is about empowering communities increasing knowledge, skills, consciousness and confidence to become critical, creative and active participants;
    - Participation - participation is rooted in the belief that communities have the right to identify their own needs and interests and responses required
    - Social Justice and Sustainable Development
      - Promoting a just society involves **promoting policies and practices that challenge injustice and value diversity**;
      - Promoting a **sustainable society involves promoting environmentally, economically and socially** sustainable policies and practices.
    - Human Rights, Equality and Anti-discrimination - Community work is concerned with the promotion of human rights and equality in society and with addressing the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by many groups.
2. The Action Plan for Rural Ireland takes cognisance of and uses as its basis the UN Sustainable Development Goals towards the development of rural Ireland in a manner that promotes human rights, equality and sustainable development.
3. The Action Plan for Rural Ireland takes cognisance of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty and identifies approaches and strategies for local bodies in rural areas to meet their obligations under the duty in relation to rural development policy and programmes.