



POLICY SUBMISSION

Submission on White Paper on Rural Development

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1. The Combat Poverty Agency

The Combat Poverty Agency is a state agency which works for the prevention and decrease of poverty and social exclusion and the reduction of inequality in Ireland by striving for change which will promote a fairer and more just, equitable and inclusive society. In particular, the Agency seeks to address the causes and consequences of poverty. It does this by working for the empowerment of those who are marginalised and excluded as a result of poverty and by addressing the problems that are manifested in disadvantaged urban and rural areas. It is a centre of expertise on poverty issues, policies and practices. A key element of its work is advising government on all aspects of economic and social planning in relation to poverty.

The Combat Poverty Agency has been concerned to tackle rural poverty in a number of ways in recent years. Most notably it has recently published a report on Poverty in Rural Ireland and contributed to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Rural Poverty. The Agency has also convened and reported on a Community Development Programme Seminar on the rural context of community development and is working on a report on rural community development practices. The Agency supports Irish Rural Link, which is a national rural anti-poverty network and has links with the Rural Community Network in Northern Ireland. In addition, the Agency supports project work and research projects in rural Ireland.

The Agency welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the development of a White Paper on Rural Development.

2. Focus of Submission – Rural Inclusion

The Irish government launched the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in April 1997. Under NAPS all government departments and state agencies and regional and local authorities have to take anti-poverty actions into account in their policy development and programme planning. The NAPS has 5 key themes:

- educational disadvantage
- unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment
- income adequacy
- disadvantaged urban areas
- rural poverty.

The problems of poverty and social exclusion have a distinct impact in a rural context as they are compounded by aspects of physical isolation and demographic dependence. In tackling rural poverty the overall NAPS objective is to tackle poverty and social exclusion in rural areas in a comprehensive and sustained manner by ensuring: the provision of an adequate income, through employment and/or income support; access to adequate services and infrastructure; co-ordination of responses; and empowerment of local people and communities.

The focus of the Combat Poverty Agency's submission to the White Paper on Rural Development is specifically on tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion. The NAPS is a key policy document in this respect.

This submission draws on a number of key reports which have documented the problems of poverty and social exclusion and suggested solutions. These include the Agency's report on Poverty in Rural Ireland, the report of the NAPS Working Group on Rural Poverty, the NESF report on Rural Renewal – Combating Exclusion, the report of the Rural Development Policy Advisory Group, and the NESC report on New Approaches to Rural Development.

A number of other reports and experiences have also informed this Submission. These include a forthcoming Combat Poverty publication on the spatial aspects of poverty, a NESC report on Population Distribution and Economic Development, experiences from the EU Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in the border counties and work on rural community development.

In this Submission, we attempt to summarise the key issues from much of the work that has already been done and comprehensively documented. We also wish to focus on actions and solutions rather than re-identifying the problems. In addressing poverty and social exclusion we wish to ensure that the focus is on people rather than on space. Within rural areas there are people who are particularly marginalised, excluded and often "invisible". Policies in rural areas, especially with regard to rural development, need to recognise the needs of those who are most disadvantaged, and to enable them to participate in the development of their areas.

3. Context – Poverty in Rural Ireland

This section provides a brief overview of the nature, extent and impact of rural poverty and the key issues arising. These issues have been documented in more detail in the reports noted in the previous section. The aim of this section is to highlight the main issues to be addressed.

3.1 What is Poverty?

As defined in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy: People are living in poverty, if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.

Thus, poverty is not just about lack of money, but may also be about isolation, underemployment, lack of educational and work opportunities, and discrimination. This is often a particular feature of rural poverty.

3.2 What is Rural?

Rural areas can be defined in spatial and socio-economic terms. There is no agreed definition of rural but in a number of reports rural has been referred to as open country or towns of less than 3,000 persons. On this basis approximately 40% of the population lives in rural Ireland. The North-West, North-East, West, Midlands and South-West regions of the country are predominantly rural. While agriculture is a central activity in rural life, rural does not necessarily mean farming as there are significant numbers of the rural population who are not engaged in any agriculture activity. The majority of rural residents are neither farmers nor directly dependent on the rural economy. A significant proportion of them are located in small towns and are propertyless, live in local authority housing estates on the edges of towns and are often marginalised, invisible and outside the mainstream of rural society.

3.3 Rural Poverty

This section first looks at the risk of poverty for farmers and then at poverty in rural areas more generally. Evidence from the 1994 Living in Ireland survey carried out by the ESRI shows that the risk of poverty for farmers has fallen between 1987 and 1994, from 33% to 20%, see Table 1. However, this is largely due to the fact that 1986, when the 1987 survey field work was carried out, was a particularly bad one for farmers. It also reflects increases in farm incomes since then.

Table 1: Risks of Relative Poverty by Labour Force Status of Head of Household, 1987 and 1994

Head of Household	% below 50% poverty line - 1987	% below 50% poverty line – 1994
Unemployed	57.2	59.4
Ill/Disabled	33.7	44.5
Home duties	9.8	34.9
Farmer	32.8	20.4
Self-employed	10.5	14.7
Retired	9.1	10.6
Employee	3.5	3.1
ALL HOUSEHOLDS	16.3	18.5

Source: Poverty in the 1990s – Oaktree Press

There is great disparity in farm incomes. Data from the 1987 and 1995 National Farm Surveys show that farms over 100 hectares recorded the biggest increases in average family farm income, from £24,700 per annum in 1987 to £65,000 per annum in 1994. In contrast, the average family farm income for the smallest farms rose only from £1,200 in 1987 to £1,700 in 1994. Thus, the gap between the incomes of large and small farms has widened considerably.

As noted above, however, the majority of rural residents are not farmers nor engaged in agriculture. When we examine the spatial distribution of poverty throughout the country we see just over one fifth of all poor households live in the open country, see Table 2. When we look at the risk of poverty households living in small villages and towns have the highest risk of poverty at 22%.

Table 2: Risks and Incidence of Poverty by Type of Area, 1994*

Type of Area	Risk	Incidence	% of all households
Open Country	9.6	21.3	33.1
Village/Town of < 3,000	21.7	15.1	10.0
Town of > 3,000	18.7	22.8	18.1
Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford	19.2	11.3	8.7
Dublin City and County	19.2	29.5	29.5
TOTAL	14.9	100.0	100.0

* Income line plus basic deprivation

Source: Where are Poor Households, Oaktree Press, forthcoming.

A multi-variate analysis¹ of poverty, based on a broad range of socio-economic indicators, shows that deprivation exists in almost every part of the country, see Map 1. Although there are differences in the degree to which disadvantage is clustered in particular areas, it is noted that disadvantage is most prevalent in Counties Donegal and Mayo, but also extensive in the border counties of Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan, as well as in Roscommon. Further significant pockets are found in North Kerry and parts of County Clare.

A notable feature is the extent to which rural Ireland seems to be influenced by urban factors. A pattern emerges of relative affluence initially and then increasing disadvantage forming concentric circles around the main centres of population. This is particularly apparent in the case of Dublin and the cities of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, but equally applies to Sligo, Dundalk, Drogheda, Cavan, Monaghan, Athlone, Ennis, Kilkenny, Cashel, New Ross and Wexford. Thus the degree to which more extensive rural areas end up being disadvantaged appears to be a function of the relative density and size of urban centres or the absence of such centres.

3.4 Characteristics of Rural Poverty

Poverty in rural areas exhibits a number of characteristics, some of which are common to both urban and rural areas. The particular distinguishing features of rural poverty have been identified as:

- high levels of invisibility; rural areas unlike urban areas do not have concentrations of disadvantage; rather rural areas are diverse and the experience of poverty is often individual and dispersed over a wide geographic area;
- out-migration and its effect on local demography in terms of depopulated areas, physical isolation and ageing populations; most rural areas have experienced a decline in population and have a high dependency rate;

¹ It is noted that this analysis weights each of 13 indicators equally, which is an important qualification in interpreting the data.

- a diminishing economic base; the decline in the relative contribution of agriculture to the rural economy and the difficulty attracting or creating alternative employment opportunities;
- small non-viable farms and difficulties for others engaged on other primary production sectors such as the fishing industry;
- low income and a dependence on social welfare in some areas;
- unemployment and underemployment; despite recent economic and employment growth, unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment remains unacceptably high;
- sub-standard housing;
- isolation of women and older people through lack of transport and access to financial resources; this is related in many areas to the poor transport infrastructure and lack of access to public transport;
- the non-availability or withdrawal of local services; this is related to the centralisation of services leading to closures of primary schools, post offices, garda stations etc;
- limited health and social services provision;
- inadequate information on services and entitlements; and
- low levels of participation in local development mechanisms and in development activity with an anti-poverty focus.

Those living in or at risk of poverty in rural areas have been identified as follows:

- farmers, (particularly those on low income non-viable farms and/or engaged in non-economic enterprises) as well as those in other primary production sectors such as the fishing industry
- those who are not property owners engaged in part-time or seasonal work
- unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed, those on low incomes, the under-employed and their dependants
- children, particularly those living in large families and early school leavers
- rural women
- lone parents
- people with disabilities
- older people, especially those living in isolated areas
- single men living alone
- Travellers.

Details on the nature of poverty and exclusion for these groups are documented in the reports noted earlier. The needs of these groups who are in or at risk of poverty should be addressed in all rural development policies.

3.6 Issues in Addressing Rural Poverty

The NESF has very usefully identified the main underlying factors involved in the process of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. These are as follows:

Centralisation: Policy is increasingly led from the centre. While centralisation may lead to greater consistency and reduce duplication, it also excludes local people and organisations from decision-making and fosters a dependency culture. In addition, it does not allow for policy responses which reflect particular local and regional concerns. There is a need for greater local involvement in rural policy development.

Rationalisation: Curtailment of services in rural areas has contributed to exclusion in recent years. Those in greatest need of services – older people and people with disabilities – may not be able to avail of them. There are strong social arguments for not curtailing services in rural areas, such as post offices, health centres, and in particular public transport.

Tensions between the Demands of Economic Efficiency and Equity: The Government plays an important role in the formulation of development strategies. This reflects objectives to promote competitiveness and also that of ensuring an even impact of development across different regions and social groups. There is a tension between the demands of economic efficiency and of equity. Efficiency is concerned with the use of resources available to society, while equity relates to the distribution of these resources. Equity, as well as efficiency must be a key consideration in the development of rural areas.

Policy Co-ordination: There is currently fragmentation of effort across a broad range of Government Departments. Rural development is identified as a specific function of the Department of Agriculture despite the fact that agriculture is no longer the mainstay of every rural community. There is a need for horizontal co-ordination across Government Departments and vertical co-ordination between local initiatives and national policy-making to ensure an integrated response to address rural poverty and to promote rural development.

Globalisation and Increased Competition: A key challenge facing the economy is global competition in the market place, which may further contribute to rural decline and exclusion.

Global Food Production: Despite the agriculture sector's relative decline, the extent of and the conditions under which agricultural production takes place have a strong impact on rural communities. Major technological advances and protectionist policies have led to a situation of general over-production.

Finally, while this section has outlined the extent and nature of poverty and social exclusion in rural Ireland there is a need to recognise that rural people and rural areas make a substantial contribution to Irish society, and to Ireland's well-being generally. Investing in rural Ireland now will ensure the sustainability of rural Ireland in the long run and increase the contribution of rural Ireland to Irish society as a whole.

4. Vision Statement

The White Paper on Rural Development should set out a vision statement on rural development in Ireland.

First, however, it is important to clarify what is meant by rural development. The NESC have defined the remit of rural development policy as all those economic and social problems found in rural areas, except those which will be dealt with by autonomous urban growth and those which can best be dealt with by undifferentiated national policies. This definition is pragmatic and it is important to appreciate that it defines a shifting boundary between rural development and other policy areas. However, it focuses on space rather than people living in rural areas. The Policy Advisory Group on Rural Development understood rural development to embrace a coherent multi-dimensional process concerned with

social, cultural and environmental as well as economic objectives. In effect, the Group focused on all public policy interventions which address the physical and social conditions of people living in rural areas, including those policies which facilitate or contribute to the capacity of rural communities to control and improve their conditions and which address the issues of rural poverty and social exclusion. This is the definition favoured by the Combat Poverty Agency.

In this context the Combat Poverty Agency suggests the following vision statement:

Rural development policy in Ireland should seek to provide a meaningful and fulfilling life for all people living in rural Ireland and a future for children born in rural Ireland.

More specifically this vision statement envisages vibrant, sustainable communities where:²

- the current socio-economic decline is reversed;
- inclusiveness is facilitated based on the principles of equity and social justice and enabling all people to live fulfilling lives;
- people living in rural Ireland will enjoy a good level of social, economic, cultural and recreational activity;
- a standard of service and infrastructure will be provided which makes rural areas attractive places in which to live and work;
- rural communities will be involved and participate in the decision making processes affecting their lives; and
- the rural environment is protected and natural resources are developed in a sustainable manner.

Under this vision statement there should an **explicit objective** to addressing poverty and social exclusion in a comprehensive and sustained manner, through:³

- the provision of an adequate income, through employment or income support or a combination of both;
- access to adequate services and infrastructure, in particular the development and provision of services locally for disadvantaged groups, including education and training, information, housing, health services and transport;

² This vision statement is based on the vision statement of the Rural Development Policy Advisory Group.

³ This objective is based on the objective to tackling poverty and social exclusion in the NAPS. For a definition of poverty, based on the NAPS, see section 2 of this Submission.

- co-ordination within and between the public, private and community/voluntary sector responses to tackling poverty in rural areas;
- empowerment of the community/voluntary sector to participate fully in the development process through partnership and consultation with the public and private sectors.

Principles for addressing poverty in rural areas should include:

- a multi dimensional, integrated, socio-economic approach;
- a partnership approach, building on national and local development partnership processes;
- ensuring equal access and participation for all;
- guaranteeing the rights of minorities especially through anti-discrimination measures;
- the reduction of inequalities and in particular addressing the gender dimension of poverty;
- actively involving the community and voluntary sector;
- encouraging self-reliance through respecting individual dignity and promoting empowerment;
- policy formulation and implementation, particularly with reference to service provision, based on the principles of equality, equity and social justice rather than economic efficiency;
- engaging in appropriate consultative processes, especially with users of services;
- a sustained concentrated approach; and
- maximisation of European and national resources to address poverty in rural areas.

5. Policy Framework

The European and national policy framework is important in the context of the development of rural development policies.

At a European level the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been central to the well-being of rural areas and farm families in particular. The CAP supports market prices for the main agricultural products and income supports in the form of direct payments to farmers. Other measures contribute to the earlier transfer of farms, environmental improvement and forestry development. While the CAP has had many positive effects, including significantly higher farm incomes, it has also led to increased polarisation of farm incomes, and profound structural changes in farming. Through CAP farm development policies have been influenced by farm modernisation and improvement schemes. Larger farmers have benefited most from these schemes. As the CAP supports are related to scale of production the smaller farmers who most need income support receive the least amount.

Structural changes will continue in agriculture well into the next century. The GATT-related CAP reforms mark a fundamental change in agriculture policy, with

protectionist measures being dismantled. The next round of negotiations will begin in 1999, with a focus on further trade liberalisation. The OECD has noted that this will further erode agricultural protection, with major consequences for the viability of farming as currently practised. This in turn has major implications for the survival of rural areas.

The sectoral approach of the CAP is increasingly being complemented by a territorial, regional rural approach. There is an increasing emphasis on direct payments to farmers and rewards for landscape management and environment protection. These pose major adjustment problems, but also opportunities, for farm households.

In the context of the forthcoming negotiations on Agenda 2000 the Irish Government should aim to maximise the income and supports for the small farmer. This commitment should be included in the White Paper on Rural Development, with reference to Article 118 of the Amsterdam Treaty which allows for the adoption on the basis of qualified majority voting of "measures designed to encourage co-operation between Member States through initiatives which aim at improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practices, promoting innovative approaches and evaluating experiences in order to combat social exclusion".

The Community Support Framework 1994-1999 and the National Development Plan 1994-1999 are the basis upon which Structural Fund investments are made in Ireland. They provide important insights into the objectives for current policies of relevance to rural areas.

The main structural weaknesses of the economy are being addressed in the Operational Programmes being implemented under the Community Support Framework in the four priority areas of:

- (i) the Productive Sector (Industry, Agriculture, Fisheries and Tourism)
- (ii) Economic Infrastructure (Transport, Energy, Communications, Environmental Services and Hospital Infrastructure)
- (iii) Human Resources
- (iv) Local Urban and Rural Development.

Given the underlying rural nature of the Irish population and of the economy, the implementation of these operational programmes represents significant developments in rural development, in strengthening the economy's productive capacity, raising skill levels and in boosting employment-creation efforts. However, these benefits need to be more evenly spread. These programmes cannot, on their own, come to grips with all the problems of rural areas on a localised basis. There is therefore a need for a specific rural development programme. The need for such a programme has been identified in the "Cork Declaration – A Living Countryside" which was the outcome of a major EU international conference on rural development held in Cork in November 1996.

The Declaration calls on policy makers to:

- raise public awareness about the importance of making a new start in rural development policy;
- to make rural areas more attractive to people to work and live in, and become centres of a more meaningful life for a growing diversity of people of all ages;
- to support a ten-point programme and co-operate as partners in the fulfilment of each and every one of the goals, which are embodied in the declaration; and
- to play an active role in promoting sustainable development in an international context.

The ten point plan contained in the “Cork Declaration” includes recommendations for a new emphasis for sustainable rural development policy with adequate resources, a multi-sectoral approach to development, support for diversification of economic and social activity, subsidiarity and an emphasis on a bottom-up approach and the preparation of a single programme approach to regional development.

In regard to the bottom-up approach, recent experience in the LEADER programme, the Area Based Partnerships, and in the County Enterprise Boards, suggests that area-based programmes involving partnerships between the local community and other agencies and interests can play a meaningful role in promoting rural development.

The White Paper on Rural Development needs to recognise the EU context in which Irish rural development policy is being developed and, as far as is possible, in the next round of Structural Funds to ensure that the benefits of EU funding reach those most in need, through poverty proofing the National Development Plan and including a chapter specifically on social inclusion measures.

5.3 National Policies

In macro-economic terms, Ireland is currently experiencing a period of economic growth and the principal economic indicators suggest that the underlying macro-economic position is relatively positive. However, despite the favourable macro-economic position unemployment remains high and the related problem of poverty and social exclusion persists.

There is currently a range of sectoral policies, programmes and measures which are being implemented to develop rural areas and to address poverty. Many of these are national policies, which may have a local or rural dimension. However, few are delivered on a co-ordinated basis.

The national agreement, Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness, represents a more strategic approach. The key objectives of the strategy are the continued development of an efficient modern economy capable of high and sustainable economic and employment growth, operating within the constraints of international competitiveness, ensuring that Irish society becomes more inclusive, that long-term unemployment is substantially reduced and that the benefits of growth are more equally distributed. Partnership 2000 provides a framework within which specific issues or programmes will be

developed to meet the three essential economic and social challenges facing the economy and society. It identifies these as:

- maintaining an effective and consistent policy approach in a period of high economic growth;
- significantly reducing social disparities and exclusion, especially by reducing long-term unemployment; and
- responding effectively, at both national, sectoral and enterprise level, to global competition and the information society.

On rural development Partnership 2000 states that the Government is committed to:

- supporting the development within the EU of an effective, multi-sectoral, integrated, area-based, participative rural development policy which is funded in its own right, and is equally committed to pressing for adequate support for agriculture under the CAP;
- reviewing the implementation of the LEADER programme in Ireland and to consider, among other things, how greater encouragement can be given to the development of group and community-based projects;
- facilitating co-operative start-ups particularly in the context of local development initiatives with the aim of securing involvement in rural development projects and activities by the greatest number of rural dwellers;
- fundamentally reviewing policies and activities in the area of rural development in light of the report of the Rural Development Policy Review Group, and preparing an action plan to guide future actions in this area; and
- examining the role of the County Strategy Groups in the delivery of local and rural development initiatives.

Partnership 2000 notes that the problems of poverty and social exclusion have a distinct impact in a rural context and will be addressed in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS).

A key element of the NAPS is that it places the tackling of poverty and social exclusion at the heart of policy-making. One of the distinguishing features of the NAPS is its intention to be a “cross-cutting” programme so that addressing poverty and social exclusion does not fall specifically within the remit of any one department.

Tackling rural poverty has been identified as a key theme within the NAPS. A Working Group was set up to prepare an overall objective for tackling rural poverty and to identify key strategies for addressing poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. Membership of the Working Group included representatives from 12 government departments plus 14 representatives from state agencies, the social partners and voluntary and community organisations. This is indicative of the broad ranging nature of rural poverty and the range of responses required to address it.

The overall target for addressing rural poverty as set out in the NAPS is:

To ensure that strategies are developed with regard to the provision of services in rural areas, especially those concerned with educational disadvantage, unemployment and income adequacy so that the overall targets of the NAPS are achieved in rural areas.

The next section of this submission puts forward policies and actions to address poverty and social exclusion in rural areas which should be included in the White Paper on Rural Development.

6. Policies and Actions to Promote Rural Inclusion

6.1 Introduction

The White Paper on Rural Development needs to recognise the distinctiveness of poverty, social exclusion and inequality in rural areas and the need to tackle it urgently. Given the dispersed and invisible nature of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas there is a particular need for improved information on the nature, causes and extent of the problem.

All national policies and government spending must be “poverty and equality proofed” to ensure that they do not contribute to the creation of poverty, that they avoid any negative impact, and where possible, make a positive contribution to addressing the needs of people who are living in poverty.

6.2 Income

Given the heterogeneous nature of poverty in rural areas national income

policies are important in tackling poverty. In particular, and in recognition of the

NAPS objective, policies in relation to income support, whether these policies relate

to employment, tax, social welfare, occupational pensions or otherwise should aim to

provide sufficient income for all those concerned to move out of poverty and to live in

a manner compatible with human dignity.

In particular, the remaining social welfare payments below the minimally adequate rate recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare should be increased to the minimum rate and there should be regular annual increases in social welfare payments based on an agreed analysis, taking account of the prevailing standard of living.

Child poverty is unacceptably high in Ireland and child income support must be improved through substantially increasing child benefit.

6.3 Agriculture

Agriculture remains one of the most important sectors of the Irish economy and is especially critical to the well-being of the rural economy. Economic trends and

market forces in combination with EU policies have had the effect of concentrating agricultural output, resources and income among a contracting number of farmers. To some extent policies have had the effect of increasing and culminating advantage and disadvantage between large and small farmers rather than reducing the gap between the two. These trends continue to undermine the viability of more and more small farmers and in many cases force them out of business. Thus, as noted by the Policy Advisory Group on Rural Development the decline in farm numbers and the numbers employed in agriculture will continue unabated in the absence of a combination of radical policy changes affecting agriculture and an increasing emphasis on the creation of alternative enterprises on suitable farms and more off-farm employment opportunities.

The Combat Poverty Agency is currently undertaking a review of farm income support policy in the context of targeting resources at low income farm households. The review will lead to the development of proposals for the better targeting of existing and/or additional resources, both cash and non-cash, at low income farm households, considering the EU and national policy contexts and the financing of such reforms.

The White Paper on Rural Development should include the objective of arresting the decline in farm numbers and of maintaining the maximum number of part-time and full-time family farm units. For this to happen the goals of agricultural policy must place a much greater emphasis on quality of output and sustainability of production and result in a re-allocation of resources towards the needs of smaller and less intensive producers. Achievement of this objective will also require the development of opportunities to augment income from farming through alternative enterprises or off-farm employment.

The maintenance of farm families requires on-farm and off-farm economic diversification to provide other job and income creation opportunities. This depends on other local economic conditions and market demand. Alternative farm enterprises have the potential for income generation for farm families but in the case of small farmers, in particular, the potential may be limited by lack of capital. Thus supports are required to enable small farmers to develop alternative farm enterprises.

In particular, the following actions are proposed:

- the establishment of minimum production quota levels with a bias in favour of small producers, and any quota available for redistribution should be channelled exclusively to small farm family units;
- differentiating the level of CAP reform compensatory payments in favour of smaller family farm units;
- adopting a more targeted approach in the operation of the disadvantaged areas scheme towards farm families in greatest need and extending these schemes to small disadvantaged units in all parts of the country;
- re-instating all investment aid schemes at the earliest opportunity and targeting them both for mainstream agricultural and alternative enterprise investments towards the needs of small and young farmers;

- biasing payments under the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) in favour of small farms;
- giving a greater emphasis to education, training and advice, particularly aimed at the needs of small and family farms, especially in the areas of mainstream farming, alternative enterprises and off-farm employment;
- reviewing the definition of farmer used in the access criteria for grants, supports and benefits, which at present states that at least 25% of income must be earned from farming;
- recognising the role of women in farming;
- Teagasc should be encouraged to provide a comprehensive advisory, education and training service free of charge to small and low income farmers.

6.4 Employment

In general paid employment should be available to all men and women currently in poverty who are seeking employment. This employment should be capable of providing adequate income, either on its own or when combined with other forms of support, sufficient to lift people out of poverty and should be available without barriers to discrimination.

Objectives of national employment policy relevant to rural development should include:

- the promotion of an enterprise culture in rural areas by enhancing and supporting human resources through a programme of animation and capacity building and the improvement of labour force skills and competence;
- the provision of a comprehensive support programme to encourage and support local enterprise development and to attract inward investment in small industrial and services development in particular;
- ensuring the competitiveness of rural areas as locations for enterprise development through service and infrastructure provision and access to information technology; and
- making the maximum use of opportunities in the social economy in terms of securing meaningful work for unemployed rural people and of improving their self-esteem and quality of life.

It should be recognised that the development of rural areas is particularly dependent on the extent to which economic activity can be diffused to a large number of smaller towns rather than concentrated on a smaller number of large towns. It must be acknowledged, however, that while economic development is a pre-requisite to addressing the problems of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, such development will not of itself solve these problems. Therefore the dispersal of economic activity must be complemented by measures to ensure social inclusion. These measures should include:

- targeting those experiencing social exclusion to share in the benefits accruing from economic activity;

- development of necessary support services such as training and capacity-building programmes;
- the promotion of local employment services in disadvantaged rural areas;
- design of development strategies to build on existing capacity, potential and needs at local and regional level;
- the implementation of a regionalised training service;
- provision of an advisory, guidance and support service for small firms and enterprises, particularly in the early stages of development; and
- support for community enterprise and co-operative approaches to development.

In addition to the problems of unemployment in rural areas, underemployment is a particular feature of labour markets in these areas. Underemployment is related to the availability of work, and whether that work is part-time or full-time. To overcome the limitations of rural labour markets attention needs to be paid to improving the availability and quality of training and work experience programmes.

However, the rural labour market can only function effectively for those experiencing social exclusion if there is a significant increase in the number of jobs available. The potential role of the social economy needs to be explored in this context, both in terms of employment and also in the supply of services such as childcare, care for older people and services to improve the quality of life in disadvantaged areas.

A number of good initiatives are already in place in promoting employment and reducing unemployment in rural areas, for example through the local area-based partnerships and LEADER. These need to be financially supported and good models promoted and extended to other areas. The White Paper should acknowledge successful initiatives and seek to promote these in other rural areas, if appropriate and applicable.

6.5 Natural Resources

The vision for the future of people living in rural Ireland is based on maintenance of vibrant sustainable and dispersed rural communities. Its achievement depends on the pursuit not only of an integrated approach to social, cultural and economic development based on the principles of equity and social justice but it also demands an approach to rural development that is environmentally sustainable. This is the case when utilising Ireland's natural resources, in particular, agriculture and food, forestry, mining, fishing and aquaculture and rural tourism. Agriculture and food production are dealt with above; forestry, mining, fishing and aquaculture and rural tourism are dealt with below.

Land use planning plays a central role in the planning and development of rural areas. A balance must be achieved between the need for economic development and the potential for job creation and the need to protect the natural resources and environment. In this context, local authorities and others charged with the development of rural areas must recognise the importance of consultation. An appropriate mechanism needs to be put in place which facilitates the full consideration of the views of local communities, in particular

where developments impact on the physical, social and cultural environment in their areas.

The development of forestry can bring considerable benefits to the rural economy. At the same time forestry can impact in a negative way leading to visual intrusion and isolating communities as well as being damaging to water quality and to fisheries. Forestry should be developed in a sensitive, sustainable manner and in a way where the benefits of the industry are accessible to local communities and not exclusively to large operators. Control over the afforestation process, therefore, through use of the grant aid system or planning application systems, would seem to be essential if the exploitation of local natural resources to produce wood is not to have a negative impact on the local economy as a whole. In particular, policy on forestry should be examined to ensure that it encourages the growth of forestry in a discriminate way that does not drive people out of rural areas.

Mining brings to local economies the danger of a boom/bust scenario, whereby the temporary prosperity in the area while the mine is in production is followed by severe depression when the mine expires. There is relatively little information on government policy in relation to mining. However, if mining development is to have any use as part of a rural anti-poverty strategy, a number of conditions need to be established: ways need to be found of retaining ownership of the natural resources as far as possible in local hands; the development of the resource needs to be planned in ways that ensure that it will interfere as little as possible with already existing forms of livelihood in the locality; access to jobs needs to be kept open for those local people most in need of work; and attention needs to be paid to the development of alternative employment before the mine is exhausted.

The fishing industry has been affected by trends towards capital intensive, larger and more efficient units, the complexity of EU regulations, technological innovations and global markets. In this situation some fishermen are being forced out of a way of life known to their families for generations, while others struggle to survive. In addition to the traditional difficulty of trying to find a favourable conjunction of weather, fish stocks and markets fishermen now have to deal with quotas, tonnage and an increasing level of regulations. Safety is also a major concern. A more comprehensive fisheries policy is required which would cover all types of fishing, with supports for the families and training for the partners ashore on the workings and requirements of the administrative aspects of fishing.

The development of aquaculture is providing increasing income and employment for local communities. However, there is a distinction between finfish farming and shellfish production. Finfish production, and in particular, salmon farming is predominantly controlled by large-scale private investors. In contrast, shellfish production such as mussel farming is more accessible to local people in terms of capital and expertise requirements, as well as being more compatible with part-time work patterns and co-operative structures. Government policy has a role to play through development assistance and licensing control. The policy should

ensure that aquaculture enterprises take into account the needs of the local community and are not environmentally damaging.

Rural tourism has been promoted in recent years in Ireland for two reasons: first, because it is seen as a significant solution to the problems of underdevelopment and poverty experienced in many rural locations in Ireland; and second, because it is often presented in the literature as a sort of “soft” tourism, that can bring economic growth to an area without the associated environmental and other destruction often associated with mass tourism. However, tourism policy needs to facilitate the entry of rural dwellers on low incomes to the industry. Rural dwellers should have access to higher grant assistance to facilitate the development of farm dwellings and out-buildings for tourist accommodation. Bord Failte’s accommodation requirement in terms of the number of rooms available and the requirement for standardisation of the accommodation should be more flexible in rural areas, to allow participation by rural dwellers and as a formal recognition of the specific characteristics of rural tourism. In addition the current situation which provides greater financial returns on the provision of accommodation rather than on the provision of activities in rural areas needs to be addressed.

In promoting rural tourism Bord Failte should establish a programme for the development of rural tourism which will proactively target the developing sectors of the industry, such as shorter week-end breaks, activity holidays, cultural holidays and educational holidays. Accredited training courses should be provided for those involved in rural tourism.

Rural tourism plans should be prepared with the involvement of the rural community groups on a regional, county and local basis drawing on the particular strengths of the area involved. Supports for rural tourism should have the objective of enabling the maximum ownership and benefit of the product at local level and seek to secure the broadest community involvement in the provision of ancillary services, activities and amenities and the establishment of rural tourism co-operatives should be encouraged.

6.6 Service Provision

There is a need for improved service provision for those experiencing social exclusion in rural areas. There are two dimensions to the provision of services in rural areas: access – bringing people to the service (improved transport and infrastructure); and delivery – bringing services to the people (local provision of services).

The White Paper on Rural Development should have a number of objectives in this area. These include:

- the maintenance of existing infrastructure and the development of new infrastructure;
- the provision of services in rural areas;
- the encouragement of new technologies.

The White Paper on Rural Development should make a commitment to implementing a programme of services in rural areas based on the principles of equity and fairness rather than purely economic criteria.

The content of the services component of the White Paper on Rural Development should be informed by the interim evaluation results of the pilot programme for the delivery of public services in rural areas.

A number of key areas of service provision are discussed in some detail in this submission. These include: education, health, housing and childcare.

Other areas of service provision which the White Paper on Rural Development should pay particular attention to are:

- the need to retain services such as post offices and garda stations in rural areas; and
- the need for improved provision of information in rural areas by government departments and state agencies through more innovative methods and modern technology.

6.7 Education

Education policy should seek to ensure that children, men and women living in poverty are able to gain access, participate in and benefit from education of sufficient quality to allow them to move out of poverty, and to prevent others from becoming poor.

In particular, the provision of education in rural areas should:

- equip young people for a meaningful adult life with the capacity to experience the broader world but also with the creative ability to realise the potential for remaining or returning to work in rural Ireland;
- be inclusive in its approach to addressing the needs of various disadvantaged and socially excluded groups;
- provide education and training in rural community development;
- ensure adequate provision of vocational education and training;
- ensure adequate provision of, and access to, adult education and life-time learning.

Research by Kellaghan et al on educational disadvantage in Ireland found that while 16% of school-going children were disadvantaged, 61% of these disadvantaged pupils lived in rural areas (defined as areas with populations of less than 10,000 people). Investment in education and training can help to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage and provide a route out of poverty.

The ability of young people to access education and training without having to leave rural areas has important consequences for population profiles of rural areas and their capacity to develop. It is therefore important that educational opportunities are provided at all levels and for all abilities in rural areas. In particular, provision should be made to educate young people with disabilities within their local area, as far as is possible.

Specifically:

- at early childhood level pre-school services are limited in rural areas. This gap must be addressed, through various and innovative provisions, such as mobile education units to cater for those living in isolated areas, development of groups through co-operation with day-time women's groups and women's organisations engaged in education and training activities and development of pre-school services attached to primary schools based on the cluster concept used to share educational services between primary schools. The White Paper on Rural Development should acknowledge the work of the Forum on Early Education.
- at primary level rural schools should be enabled to provide disadvantaged students with a package of services including small classes to allow teachers time to individualise learning for students, remedial education teachers, resource teachers and home-school-community liaison teachers; rural schools should have library/resource room facilities to give students opportunities for learning which they may not have access to in the home; consideration should be given to improving the range of subjects on offer in small rural primary schools, and to enhancing the mobile school library services in isolated rural areas. All primary schools should have at least two teachers. Sub-standard accommodation in some rural schools should be upgraded as a priority. The Breaking the Cycle Scheme should be extended to additional disadvantaged schools in rural areas.
- at second level recommended interventions include similar elements to those proposed for rural primary schools. In addition, because of the diversity of the second level curriculum, specific interventions are required to ensure that appropriate programme choice is provided to students.

More generally there is a need for:

- flexibility in the provision of educational services in primary and post-primary schools eg. provision of mobile educational libraries, career guidance teachers, peripatetic specialist teachers and teachers with specialist skills;
- development of services to enable rural schools to share educational services on a cluster model;
- imaginative and innovative use of IT in all rural schools with appropriate staff training;
- fostering of partnerships between schools and local communities. The Combat Poverty Agency currently has an Educational Disadvantage Demonstration Programme operating in Tuam and Tralee which may provide useful ideas in this regard; and
- greater flexibility in the provision of school transport.

Further education and third level education needs to be provided in rural areas, through out-reach or distance learning packages with supports, if necessary.

Provision of adult and lifelong learning opportunities are important in rural areas. The current inadequacy of provision or access to local training centres and the inadequate levels of provision for adult and second chance education and adult career counselling mean that the education and training needs of the adult population in rural areas are not being properly catered for. There needs to be consultation with local communities and local providers to ascertain levels of need and requirements at a local level and adequate supports provided, including financial to ensure adequate provision of adult and lifelong learning opportunities in rural areas. The White Paper on Rural Development should acknowledge the forthcoming Green Paper on Adult Education.

The provision of women's education is a particular need in rural areas. This raises a number of issues such as access, child care and other care supports and progression and accreditation. The development of women's education could also usefully learn from existing initiatives in this area such as the Women's Education Initiative, administered by the Department of Education which is supporting projects on lifelong learning for women in South Kerry, Aontas' national women's education initiative and the National Travellers Women's Forum on promoting Traveller women's inclusion in mainstream educational initiatives. There are various women's education projects in the border counties which have been funded under the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, which may also provide useful models.

It is clear that education is a key mechanism for tackling poverty and there are particular issues relating to the provision of education in rural areas. A range of measures are required to address this. Some of these have been highlighted above. However, it is acknowledged that examples of good delivery and provision do exist. The White Paper on Rural Development needs to recognise these and draw on the lessons from these initiatives to propose and resource a comprehensive education policy for rural areas in conjunction with the Department of Education, local providers and the community and voluntary sector.

6.8 Health

Health care is a key issue in rural areas in terms of both adequacy and access. The availability of community care services is very important for people living in rural areas and particularly so for older people, people with a disability and for young families.

Remoteness, isolation, bad housing and patchy community care services combine to complicate decision-making for old people in some rural areas, along with unbalanced demography and high levels of emigration. A combination of some or all of these factors may lead to old people having to leave their home and be admitted to an institution, even though assessment of physical dependency may have deemed home care to be the most appropriate placement. The availability of home-help services significantly increases the likelihood of older people remaining in their homes, even with relatively high levels of disability. Home helps provide many basic services that would otherwise be denied old people because of their incapacity and subsequent inability to carry out activities of daily living. Home help is particularly beneficial if

an old person does not have a network of family and friends to provide assistance with those activities. The overall provision of home-help service is, however, low across the country. The improvement of home-help and other community care services should be included in the White Paper. It should be noted that statutory support does not always imply public provision of care, but it does usually mean more public financing of community-care services, particularly in the areas of home help, care attendant schemes, home nursing, voluntary housing and informal community-support networks involving voluntary and community groups.

Access problems in rural areas are not confined to older people. Medical card holders in rural areas tend to live much further away from their doctors than their urban counterparts. Choice of general practitioners and other services are therefore limited. Dental services in particular are inadequate in rural areas and need to be improved.

In general, solving the problem of exclusion associated with remoteness requires more emphasis on the supply side, rather than trying to deal with access problems through influencing consumer behaviour. Suggestions on how this might be addressed include the introduction of sparsity-related incentive payments to encourage the provision of services in remote rural areas. Another suggested approach would be the implementation of a scheme for the placement of medical graduates in rural areas on completion of their studies for a period of one or two years. Thus, where services are considered essential their availability should be guaranteed, irrespective of geographical location. Doing this may require a more innovative and flexible use of personnel than has been the case to date.

Community-based healthcare strategies based on primary healthcare models have a particular contribution to make to improved access to health care services and control over health resources at local level in rural areas. The Health Boards should be encouraged to promote such an approach in partnership with relevant community groups. This should build on pilot initiatives and mobile services in existence.

The White Paper on Rural Development needs to acknowledge the National Health Strategy and its proposals on health policy in rural areas. In particular, there is a need to apply the principle of equality, which imposes a particular obligation upon the health services to pay special attention to geographic areas or population groups where the indicators of health status are below average.

6.9 Housing

The availability of suitable housing in rural areas is critical in retaining population in rural areas and promoting social inclusion. Irish housing policy currently promotes home ownership. This has led to under-provision of social housing and lack of choice for people unable to afford the increasing costs of home ownership. The White Paper on Rural Development needs to recognise the housing needs of people living in rural Ireland, particularly for low income households.

In particular, housing policies in rural areas should continue to have a greater emphasis on smaller estates and stand alone housing, and as far as possible people should be re-housed within their own geographical location. Communal facilities on estates, such as staffed resource centres and playgrounds have a central contribution to make to the quality of life on housing estates. A rolling development plan should be prepared on the basis of inter-agency co-operation and involving tenants to address the needs of communities on local authority estates. Such a priority estates programme would emphasise refurbishment of housing to up-to-date standards, especially in relation to heating and insulation, and include an estate budget for communal facilities and prioritise and resource tenant participation.

In addition, there is a need for an improved refurbishment programme in rural areas targeted on poor quality private houses occupied by low income families. There is also a need to ensure provision of accommodation and facilities for Travellers in rural areas, as recommended in the Traveller Task Force Report.

Two further issues relate to second home ownership and planning permission. The demand for second homes in some rural locations “artificially” increases prices and may mean that local people, particularly local people on low incomes, are unable to purchase a home in own locality. A second issue relates to the difficulty in some areas of acquiring planning permission to live in the local rural area. While recognising the need for development control, this needs to be balanced against the desire of local people to live in their local area, which is also desirable from a rural development point of view. The White Paper on Rural Development needs to address these issues.

6.10 Childcare

Childcare is an important component of anti-poverty strategies: pre-school provision addresses the educational needs of children and contributes to their long-term participation in the education system; and childcare facilitates women’s access to the labour market. Childcare provision is poor throughout Ireland; this is particularly the case in rural Ireland. An Expert Working Group is currently meeting and producing a report on Childcare in Ireland. The White Paper on Rural Development should acknowledge the work of this Group and consider the implications of its recommendations for rural development.

In particular, the White Paper on Rural Development should consider and examine innovative arrangements for childcare in rural areas such as community ownership, the use of mobile creches, and incentives for employers to provide facilities.

6.11 Transport

The availability of transport as a means of access to public and private services and places of work is a major issue for people living in rural areas. The centralisation of service provision means that transport plays an important role in accessing services such as health care and in the social integration of people living away from the major centres of provision. The absence of public transport is, therefore, one of the major determinants of social exclusion in rural areas.

The limitations of public passenger services mean that rural dwellers who do not have access to a car are severely restricted by lack of access to services and facilities. Even for those who can manage the acquisition and maintenance of a car, the distances to be travelled for some rural dwellers mean that transport costs are a significant impediment to mobility and inclusion.

In the context of improving transport in rural areas to promote social inclusion the Combat Poverty Agency suggests that the following should be included in the White Paper:

- consideration is given to the greater use of school buses. This should include the introduction of school buses with suitable access for people with disabilities and mobility problems;
- consideration is given to a targeted increase in investment in rural transport services. Funding is required to apply relevant solutions at a local level involving a combination of operators, in the public and private sectors and in the social economy;
- local transport audits should be undertaken of public transport, transport operated by health boards, school buses, voluntary organisations and private operators to facilitate greater local planning and more effective co-ordination in the improvement of transport facilities and services.

6.12 Community Development

Community development has a vital role to play in tackling poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. Recognition of the value and role of the voluntary and community sector and support for the sector must be essential elements of rural development policy. However, it should be acknowledged that representation of rural communities may not necessarily reflect the interests of the most disadvantaged, but rather those who are most vocal and locally powerful social actors. Care must be taken to ensure that the views and interests of those who are most marginalised are taken into consideration.

The objectives of the White Paper on Rural Development should include:

- to enable the community and voluntary sector to participate in the development process and to contribute to rural development formulation and development. In this regard reference should be made to the Green Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity;
- to ensure, through a coherent approach to community development, an inclusive society in which women and young people, in particular, are encouraged to participate
- to empower and support active rural communities to take the initiative in their areas; and
- to help create a sense of community, local identity and community spirit which will make rural areas attractive places in which to live and work.

In particular actions to promote community development should include:

- the principle of participation for rural communities in the structure and decision-making processes affecting them. This should be incorporated into all areas of rural development;
- the work of local area-based partnership companies and groups in non-designated areas should be continued and mainstreamed as much as possible;
- the institutional structures for implementing rural development policy should incorporate a national community development programme for animation and capacity building. The programme should provide the development staff to work with communities – examples are provided in the Community Development Programme, the local area-based partnerships and in the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme;
- increased support for locally based womens groups in rural areas;
- the provision of a comprehensive capacity building programme including appropriate training;
- support for community development groups to work with people who are currently the most marginalised in rural Ireland;
- support for and recognition of networks of local community groups working against poverty and social exclusion in rural areas eg. the Irish Rural Link and the Community Workers Co-operative
- the need to identify ways of rural community groups linking to address issues such as domestic violence, disability and Travellers issues, paying particular attention to the Task Force/Commission reports on these issues as they relate to rural areas; and
- support for a development community arts approach to groups working in disadvantaged rural areas.

7. Institutional Mechanisms

The institutional mechanisms which will be put in place to deliver rural development policy will be critical in its success, particularly in promoting social inclusion. The will involve considerable horizontal and vertical integration. The model proposed by the Policy Advisory Committee is one which could usefully be adopted in the White Paper on Rural Development to deliver the rural development proposals.

At national level while it will be important that there will be a lead Department, the Department of Agriculture and Food. This should include a specific Rural Development Section within it and a Minister of State whose remit is rural development. However, it will be extremely important that there are explicit mechanisms to link across a range of Departments, at both political and administrative levels. This could be through a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Rural Development and an inter-departmental policy committee on rural development, as proposed by the Policy Advisory Group. The SMI Initiative would be relevant here, in linking rural development and anti-poverty initiatives across departments.

An important component at national level would be the establishment of a **National Rural Development Forum**. The Forum would include representatives across the relevant government departments, state agencies, local and regional authorities, social partners, community and voluntary sector, business interests and other relevant sectoral interests. The Forum would have an important role in providing policy advice and guidance and in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of rural development policy and programmes.

A strengthened regional structure would enhance the delivery of rural development policy. This could include the allocation of resources and roles to the Regional Authorities to engage in regional level planning and the implementation of regional level initiatives. This could be through **Regional Development Committees** including representatives from the local authorities, state agencies, social partners, community and voluntary sector and the business community.

At **local level** a reformed system of local government has the potential to provide a more effective delivery of a range of public services. However, rural development, and within that the promotion of social inclusion needs to be a specific policy objective and should be part of the work of Strategic Policy Advisory Groups. It will be important that this includes adequate representation from the community and voluntary sector. The proposal from the Policy Advisory Group to have a County Development Board including representatives of the community and voluntary sector would seem to be worth pursuing.

Local structures at sub-county level, comprising representatives of the voluntary and community sector, local business interests, the local authorities, state agencies and the social partners at local level could be an important mechanism for local support and linkages.

In the establishment of institutional structures it will be important to identify clear linkages vertically and horizontally and in promoting social inclusion to identify and acknowledge the role that the community and voluntary sector have to play.

Finally, it is important to relate to the institutional arrangements for rural development in Northern Ireland and the particular circumstances and initiatives in rural development in the border counties.

8. Conclusions

The Combat Poverty Agency welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the White Paper on Rural Development. The Agency has argued that rural

development has an important role to play in breaking the cycle of poverty for people who are poor in rural Ireland and in promoting social inclusion.

It is important that any policy on rural development has a comprehensive and broad ranging remit identifying its place within the European and national policy context and then identifying specifically rural development issues. In this way it should relate closely to the aims, objectives and targets of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, which has as one of its themes the tackling of rural poverty.

The community and voluntary sector has a critical role to play in addressing poverty at a local level by empowering and supporting people to participate in improving their own lives. This work, however, needs to be complemented by strong national policies and actions to tackle poverty. The community and voluntary sector should be a central part of any institutional mechanisms put in place to deliver a comprehensive rural development policy.

To really make a difference and to ensure that all people living in rural Ireland can live a fulfilling and meaningful life will require resources to implement the policy proposals. A commitment needs to be made to implementing the policies based on principles of equity and social justice rather than purely economic criteria. In the short-term the tiger economy can afford it – and this investment is vital if we are to sustain healthy vibrant communities in the rural Ireland of tomorrow. The alternative is a dying rural Ireland with no long-term future.

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