Rural Community Network and the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium

Report

Baseline Study of Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland

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1 Introduction

This is the report of a Baseline Study of Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

The study was commissioned by the Rural Community Network and Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium. The research was carried out by independent consultants, Macaulay Associates, between February and June 2007.

The report includes:

- An executive summary of the main findings and recommendations
- Information on the background to the baseline study
- The terms of reference of the research
- An explanation of the research methodology
- A presentation of findings under each research objective
- A set of main conclusions
- A series of recommendations for the future based on the findings
- A bibliography
- A set of associated appendices

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This is the report of a Baseline Study of Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The study was commissioned by the Rural Community Network and Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium. The research was carried out by independent consultants, Macaulay Associates, between February and June 2007.

Main Conclusions

The main conclusions of the research are as follows:

1) The research identified a total of 1,238 rural women's groups and organisations in Northern Ireland.
2) Most of these groups are church based women's groups (mainly Presbyterian Women's Associations and Mothers Unions), Women's Institutes, Community Based Women's Groups, Young Women's Groups (mainly Girls Brigades and Guides) and Sports Groups (mainly Women's Gaelic Sports).
3) There are very few business, ethnic minority, training and farming women's groups and organisations.
4) A substantial regional, sub regional and local infrastructure of rural women's groups and organisations currently exists and this is a significant component of social capital in rural communities.
5) The whole of the current infrastructure is insecure as it relies heavily on short term funding.
6) The existing sub regional infrastructure of Rural Women's Networks is currently facing serious problems with financial sustainability.
7) There are geographical gaps in terms of sub regional rural women's support in Antrim, North Armagh, North Down and South and West Tyrone.
8) Many local groups are facing difficulties in securing grants and/or fundraising to sustain their group and in engaging new, younger members/volunteers.
9) Most groups have a shared purpose of social, educational and community development.

10) The main activities of the groups are social and recreational activities, arts and crafts, providing information, personal development, cross community work, community development and providing adult education and/or training.
11) There is less activity in addressing farming issues, business development, social economy projects and ethnic minorities work and there is a low level of activity that is addressing domestic violence, sexual orientation and politics.
12) There are parallel and often unconnected rural women's infrastructures within Protestant and Catholic communities and limited awareness, networking and collaboration across the separate infrastructures. However, there is a level of cross community contact for many groups at a sub regional and regional level and potential for rural women's groups and organisations to play a role in 'bridging social capital' between the two communities in rural Northern Ireland.
13) There are low levels of participation in groups by women who are under 25, who are divorced or separated, who are neither Protestant nor Catholic, who are from an ethnic minority group, who are lesbian or who have a disability.
14) Women play a central role as active volunteers within local rural community development groups and voluntary organisations.
15) Rural women are significantly under represented as elected representatives in the NI Assembly, among rural MLAs, on rural local authorities, on key education bodies and on the Boards of LSPs.
16) Rural women are significantly under represented on a range of key strategic rural development organisations.
17) Men are under represented on the staff of RDC, RCN and the RSNs.
18) The main types of information source for women's groups are newsletters, websites, magazines, leaflets, local newspapers and word of mouth and the main information sources are local newspapers, NICVA, RCN, RSNs, Rural Women's Networks, regional and headquarter voluntary/church/youth/sport organisations and local Councils.
19) Most of the community development and enterprise development support offered is generic rather than targeting rural women's groups in particular.

20) The key skills on management committees of rural women's groups are financial, organisational, communication, planning and management, committee, leadership and interpersonal skills. There is not a significant skills gap on current management committees. Additional skills required are mainly around finance, funding/fundraising, PR and computer skills.
21) Structural and organisational culture barriers are more significant factors than skills gaps in the lower representation of women in political and public bodies. Key skills of women in political positions and public bodies are communication skills, public speaking and presentations skills, questioning and critiquing skills and specific skills to ensure the views and opinions of women are heard, valued and influential in a male dominated environment. In addition to skills, confidence, and experience, knowledge and awareness of rural community development, public bodies and policy are also important.
22) Men in political positions/public bodies and on Boards of key rural development organisations need greater awareness of gender issues and community development and there are skills gaps around creating inclusive meetings.

Recommendations

As a result of the baseline study it is proposed that the following recommendations are presented to the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development:

9.1 As part of its Gender Equality Strategy, DARD should take the lead in establishing a gender balanced partnership, involving the main regional rural development stakeholders (DARD, RCN and RDC) along with NIRWN, to develop a long term strategy for women in rural development in Northern Ireland. This should include:

1) a strategy and time related action plan for redressing gender imbalance in all rural development organisations
2) a strategy for removing organisational culture and structural barriers to the equal participation of women and men in all rural development organisations including gender awareness training, transport and childcare support and changing the timing and location of meetings to ensure full participation.
3) a long term strategy for sustaining regional and sub regional support and local rural women's infrastructure, taking opportunities arising from the Review of Public Administration and the wider review of community/voluntary sector infrastructure.
4) the development of a Mentoring Support Initiative to support rural women applying to and participating on Boards and public bodies
5) targeted support for initiatives that increase women's involvement in farming issues, business development and social economy projects

9.2 The main regional rural women's stakeholders (including NIRWN, Rural Women's Networks, WI, Church, Youth, Voluntary and Sports Bodies), led by NIRWN, should work in partnership, to develop a shared vision for working together for the benefit of all rural women to develop a strategy that will:

1) Increase the connections, awareness, networking and collaboration between rural women's infrastructures within Protestant and Catholic communities.
2) Develop rural women's groups' role in 'bridging social capital' between the two communities in rural Northern Ireland and contribution to building a Shared Future in rural communities.

3) Increase the participation of young women in rural women's groups.
4) Increase rural women's representation as elected representatives.
5) Increase the number of women's groups addressing ethnic minority, domestic violence, sexual orientation and supporting women to engage in politics.
6) Increase the participation of women who are divorced or separated, who are neither Protestant nor Catholic, who are from an ethnic minority group, who are lesbian or who have a disability, in rural women's groups.
7) Develop women's skills required in finance, funding/fundraising, PR and computer skills.
8) Engage women and men together in gender awareness training
9) Explore partnership models of rural women working together in other countries
10) Implement a Mentoring Support Initiative to support rural women applying to and participating on Boards and public bodies.
11) Support and advise NIRWN as it works in partnership with the main regional rural development stakeholders to develop a long term strategy for women in rural development in Northern Ireland.

9.3 RCN should promote and monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

9.4 RCN should, in partnership with the other relevant stakeholders, examine, develop and promote a holistic approach to gender in rural community development.

3 Background to the Research

3.1 Context

While the focus of the research is to baseline an infrastructure, it is important to frame this within the broader gender research context which has found that society often leaves women at a structural disadvantage. Apparently unconnected policy developments may collectively disadvantage women in a systemic way and may disadvantage rural women in particular. While these wider systemic issues are not the primary focus of this research, they are related to the purpose of an infrastructure, and it is therefore important to locate the findings and recommendations of the baseline within this context. The bibliography includes previous research that explores these issues in more depth.

3.2 Rural Community Network

The Rural Community Network (RCN) is a voluntary organisation established by community groups from rural areas in 1991. It is a membership organisation with over 450 members.

RCN is managed by a voluntary committee, elected every two years, made up of two community representatives from each of the six counties in Northern Ireland along with farming, environmental, district council, cross border, voluntary organisation representatives, women's organisations and disability groups. RCN aims to reflect a broad geographical, gender and religious mix in its membership and Board.

The aims of RCN are:

1. To provide rural people with the skills required to engage effectively with decision makers
2. To promote rural community development practice as an agent for change
3. To promote volunteering and, in particular, focus on encouraging volunteers from the most excluded sectors of rural society
4. To support rural communities in making a contribution towards 'A Shared Future' through community relations and good relations work
5. To support rural communities in exploring what sustainable development means in a rural context

RCN has been central to the establishment and development of a community development support network infrastructure across rural parts of Northern Ireland.

RCN has also worked closely with the rural women's groups to develop the network infrastructure of rural women across NI.

The Women's Sectoral Programme was developed by RCN in partnership with:

- Fermanagh Women's Network
- Mid Ulster Women's Network
- Newry & Mourne Women's Network
- Omagh Women's Area Network
- Roe Valley Women's Network
- South Armagh Rural Women's Network
- Women's Research and Development Agency (WRDA)

3.3 Rural Women's Sectoral Programme

The aims of the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme were:

1 To support all stages of the development of rural women's organisations and promote the active involvement of rural women in rural development and wider policy

2 To support the development of rural women's projects throughout rural Northern Ireland

3 To develop a number of social/economic/environmental/cultural projects with, for and by rural women that contribute to the regeneration of local communities

4 To identify the development needs of rural women and through a multi agency approach provide appropriate responses.

5 To ensure that women from all traditions of rural NI are actively engaged in the programme and the management of the programme.

4 Terms of Reference

The commissioning body devised the following terms reference for the research:

4.1 Purpose

The purpose of the baseline study was to provide a picture of the current rural women's infrastructure, their representation in rural community activity and decision making, the level of rural community activity for rural women and the level of community development skills within the women's sector.

4.2 Aims

The aims of the baseline study were:

(a) To carry out baseline research in relation to the aims of the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme

(b) To analyse the findings of this research in the context of rural women's development and programmes for the future

(c) To present a clear set of findings, conclusions and recommendations in a research report

4.3 Key Areas

The research was to explore seven key areas, with a particular focus on gap analysis:

4.3.1 Current Rural Women's Infrastructure

<u>Research</u>

The number of women's groups and organisations at local, sub-regional and regional level within rural NI including the areas covered by their work, and the type of work/activities they are involved in e.g. service provision, training, capital projects.

Gap Analysis

Identification of geographic and activity gap areas in terms of rural women's activity within rural development[1].

4.3.2 Rural Diversity

Research

Representation in relation to Section 75 groupings within rural women's groups/organisations both from an area and the wider rural development sector.

Gap Analysis

Identification of diverse range of groupings within rural women's groups/organisations identifying gaps in groupings in terms of diversity as defined by Section 75.

4.3.3 Rural Women and Community Representation

Research

The membership and level of women on key rural development organisations and community organisations and the issues relating to this representation

Gap Analysis

An analysis of the membership and level of women on key rural development organisations and community organisations and the issues relating to this representation. Recommendations resulting from this analysis for rural development organisations, community organisations, government and statutory departments, Political Parties etc to expand rural women's involvement at all levels in rural development organisations and community organisations.

4.3.4 Project Activity

Research

The number of community development projects currently active where key beneficiaries are rural women's groups/organisations and the level of funding for

[1] Throughout this report 'rural development' refers to a wide range of economic and social development in rural areas while 'rural community development' refers specifically to that part of rural development that involves the work and principles of community development in rural communities.

these projects.

Gap Analysis

Identification of gap areas, either geographically or sectoral, in terms of project activity or development and identification of gap areas in terms of project funding received.

4.3.5 Information for Rural Women

Research

List and categorise information sources available for rural women e.g. Newsletters, Websites, magazines etc

Gap Analysis

Identify information gaps for rural women's community development support and provide recommendations to address this

4.3.6 Skills Analysis of rural women

Research

The skills on current management committees of rural women's groups/organisation (random analysis). The skills of rural women in political positions, on public bodies, and in senior government.

Gap Analysis

Identify skill gaps on current management committees of rural women's groups/organisation. Identify skill gaps in terms of representation of rural women and provide recommendations which support, build capacity and enhance skills of rural women to encourage them to take up positions on representative bodies

4.3.7 Support needs

Research

The level of community development support and enterprise development support available to rural women's groups.

Gap Analysis

Identify gaps in support available to rural women's groups in community development.

5 Definitions

For the purposes of the research it was necessary to develop an appropriate working definition of two key elements within the terms of reference: 'Women's Group/Organisation' and 'Rural'. This was essential to provide a clear and definitive baseline. It enabled the researchers to assess whether or not a group should be included in the numbers of groups and in the surveying of groups.

The following definitions were reached in consultation with the Advisory Group as the most appropriate, feasible and useful definitions in relation to the terms of reference.

5.1 Women's Groups and Organisations

The Terms of Reference are clear that this should be a baseline of rural women's infrastructure.

While the research did include an analysis of rural women's representation in rural development, it did not set out to identify the number of women involved in rural development activity in general. The focus was primarily on rural women's groups and organisations. For the purposes of this research this was defined as all women's organisations or groups, run by women, who organise activities for women (aged 16 years or over) – in other words, groups run by women for women.

As result of this, mixed gender groups with mainly women participants such as a local community group, an older persons group or a parents group are not included. Young women's groups of 16 year olds and over and Mothers Groups are included, while under 16s/girls groups and mixed gender childcare/preschool groups[2] are not included.

5.2 Rural

There is no single agreed definition of 'rural' in Northern Ireland. A variety of definitions have been applied to research, policies, strategies and programmes.

However for the purpose of this baseline study it was essential to set a clear definition that makes a distinction between rural and urban women's groups and organisations. This ensures that the baseline is robust and definitive.

Broad definitions, such as 'all groups outside of Greater Belfast and Lisburn, and Derry City' or 'all Local Authority Areas except Belfast, Derry, Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey, Castlereagh and North Down' did not prove to be satisfactory for the purpose of the baseline. These definitions both exclude women's groups and organisations located in villages within these areas and include women's groups and organisations in large urban settlements outside of these areas.

In February 2005, the Inter Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group (Source: NISRA) recommended a 'default urban-rural definition'.

"In the absence of a programme-specific definition, Bands A-E can be defined as urban and Bands F-H as rural. This reflects the broad consensus of past departmental usage that the divide between urban and rural lies among settlements whose populations are between 3,000 and 5,000. Under this definition, approximately 65 per cent of the Northern Ireland population live in urban areas and 35 per cent in rural areas."

[2] However, women's groups that provide childcare as part of their work are included

Table 1: Classification of settlements (Inter Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group (Source: NISRA)

Band A: Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA) c580,000
Band B: Derry Urban Area (DUA) c90,000
Band C: Large town 18,000 and under 75,000
Band D: Medium town 10,000 and under 18,000
Band E: Small town 4,500 and under 10,000
Band F: Intermediate settlement 2,250 and under 4,500
Band G: Village 1,000 and under 2,250
Band H: Small village, hamlet and open countryside -settlements of less than 1,000 people and open countryside

However they added:

"It is stressed that this definition should not be used in a prescriptive way and policy-makers will need to consider the appropriateness of settlement and urban/rural classifications to individual policies."

The Group recommended that:

"Government departments and other users should consider defining 'urban' and 'rural' areas in ways which are appropriate for different programmes and projects. Thus as an example, a settlement such as Castlederg or Keady may be eligible for certain rural programmes because such settlements provide services for rural hinterlands. However such settlements are likely to have housing or commercial areas that have urban characteristics, and therefore may also validly be eligible for certain urban programmes. It follows that different definitions of urban and rural are appropriate on different occasions."

The Rural Development Council's Response to the Regional Strategy in October 2006 stated:

The NISRA settlement hierarchy has offered the definition of rural as all settlements below 2,250; that is; villages, small villages, hamlets and open countryside. For rural to retain is distinctiveness as a unit of analysis for development and for equality proofing, this is the more appropriate definition, however, based on our own work in rural settlement planning and development we would also recognise the appropriateness and value of including small towns (as defined in the next band of the hierarchy). Such a definition is in keeping with the analysis presented by Chapter 8 (changes in the rural economy, changes in rural society and the changing rural environment) which are all clearly describing that portion of economic and social life organised around the land and smaller settlements up to those of small towns.

We would recommend then that a definition of rural to support a functional and analytical appraisal of rural change and development encompasses no more than bands E – H of the NISRA statistical classification of settlements."

Meanwhile the 'Shaping Our Future' document stated:

"In terms of role and function, Northern Ireland's development network consists of a web of interdependent centres, or urban hubs, ranging in scale from the BMA, to the main towns (the larger traditional market towns with a population of 10,000-30,000+), and small towns (5,000-10,000 persons), with the regional transport network providing the cohesive links between all parts of the Region. Some of the main towns offer a higher level of services than found in other towns of similar size in the Region, reflecting large rural catchment areas with over 100,000 residents. These towns form a 'family of settlements' which provide a fairly well balanced hierarchy of employment and service centres across the Region.

The extensive network of urban hubs is evenly spread and well placed to serve a strong rural community living either in villages, small settlements, or in a distinctive pattern of dispersed dwellings in the open countryside. Rural Northern Ireland comprises the main and small towns, and their rural catchment areas characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern."

The Rural Community Network has also highlighted the importance of small and medium towns as the hub of many rural communities.

The Department of Social Development states:

"The working definition of urban is greater than 4,500 residents."

Its Urban Regeneration Regional Development Office is responsible for the following city, towns and urban areas within the Belfast Metropolitan Area:

- Bangor
- Carrickfergus
- Carryduff
- Castlereagh
- Greenisland
- Holywood
- Newtownabbey
- Lisburn

It is also responsible for these large towns and city elsewhere in Northern Ireland:

- Antrim
- Ballymena
- Coleraine
- Craigavon - Lurgan and Portadown
- Larne

- Newry
- Newtownards
- Omagh

The purpose of the baseline is to provide a picture of current women's sector infrastructure in rural areas. A simple definition of groups in settlement areas of 4,500 or less (bands F-H) would exclude important parts of the infrastructure that are located in small and medium towns, acting as a hub for rural groups and serving a significant rural hinterland.

In light of the various definitions and the nature of the baseline study the following definition of rural was used. The baseline includes:

- all local women's groups and organisations located in any settlement of less than 4,500 people anywhere in Northern Ireland

- all local women's groups and organisations in NISRA bands E-H (settlements up to 10,000)

- all women's groups and organisations located in larger towns that provide a rural networking or infrastructure function, or that serve a rural hinterland or that define themselves as rural

The baseline does not include:

- local women's groups and organisations located in settlements of over 10,000 or that are defined as urban regeneration areas

6 Research Methodology

A proposed research methodology was developed and agreed with RCN. This methodology is described below:

6.1 Advisory Group

A Research Advisory Group was established to inform and advise the research. Key stakeholders from a diverse range of rural, research and women's groups and organisations were invited to participate in the Advisory Group. The letter inviting members to participate is in Appendix I. A list of the members who attended the Research Advisory Group is in Appendix II.

The Research Advisory Group played a key role in advising on the research. This included:

- Sharing knowledge and information on rural women's groups and organisations to ensure the baseline was thorough and accurate
- Contributing to the exploration of issues emerging from the qualitative aspects of the research
- Discussing and assessing the research findings
- Appraising proposed recommendations that emerged from the research

The group met at the beginning and towards the conclusion of the research. At its first meeting in March 2007, the Advisory Group:

- discussed the terms of reference of the research and explored important definitions for the research including 'rural' and 'women's group/organisation'
- reviewed the methodology and approach and agreed any necessary refinements
- participated in a mapping exercise to begin to map the number, nature and

A series of interviews were carried out with a sample of 20 individuals representing a range of organisations/agencies.
The purpose of the interviews was to elicit qualitative information on:

- women's participation in rural development activity
- rural women's infrastructure
- community representation and related issues
- project activity
- the level and nature of support offered and delivered to rural women's groups and organisations
- information available for rural women's groups and organisations
- skills of women on committees, Boards and public bodies
- good practice
- levels, challenges and barriers in relation to diversity.

The interviews were carried out with:

- a sample of leaders of rural women's groups/organisations
- a sample of rural women on the Boards of RCN, RDC and RSNs (as only 2 participants attended the Board Members Focus Group, this was supplemented by interviews of Board Members)
- a sample of rural women in public bodies and political positions
- a sample of representatives of support agencies

A list of the interview questions is in Appendix V and a list of the interviewees is in Appendix VI.
In addition to the interviews, a questionnaire was circulated to 100 regional and sub regional community development and enterprise development support

agencies to ascertain the level of support specifically targeted at rural women's groups. 14 completed questionnaires were returned. The questionnaire is in Appendix IX.

6.6 Focus Groups

A series of three focus groups were facilitated to explore and discuss key issues around infrastructure, representation, project activity, information and support, participation, diversity and skills. The focus groups were as follows:

- Board Members Focus Group: 2 women Board members of RCN, RDC and RSNs
- Regional Leaders Focus Group: 6 leaders of a range of regional women's organisations
- Local Participants Focus Group: 13 participants in local women's groups in the Cookstown area (the focus group was carried out as part of the 'What Women Want Conference' organised by Positive Steps Women's Group in Cookstown)

A list of the focus group questions are in Appendix VII and a list of the participants in each of the focus groups is in Appendix VIII.

In addition to the focus groups one of the researchers participated in a Gender Workshop at the RCN Summer School to explore research issues with a group of 8 men and women involved in rural community development.

6.7 Web Discussion

As series of research questions were posted on the RCN Website Discussion

Forum inviting comment. The comments posted on the website have been analysed alongside the interview and focus group data.

6.8 Draft Report

A series of draft reports were produced and presented to RCN, the Advisory Group and the members of Rural Women's Sector Consortium for feedback. The final report includes the amendments suggested at the draft reports stage.

The research was carried out by two main researchers from Macaulay Associates, Bernie Laverty and Tony Macaulay, with support from Rosaleen McElhone and Libby Lamont at RCN.

7 Findings

7.1 Current Rural Women's Infrastructure

7.1.1 Number, Type and Location of Groups

The research identified a total of 1,238 rural women's groups and organisations in Northern Ireland, using the definitions explained in Section 5.

The breakdown of groups by location is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Location of Rural Women's Groups and Organisations in NI by County

County	Number of Rural Women's Groups/Organisations
Antrim	239
Armagh	151
Derry/Londonderry	205
Down	329
Fermanagh	81
Tyrone	233

The groups were categorised into ten main types as follows:

- Business: groups with a primary focus on women in business and/or enterprise
- Church: church and faith based women's groups
- Community: local community women's groups
- Ethnic Minority: groups of women from minority ethnic communities
- Farming: groups with a primary focus on farming/fisheries
- Politics: groups with a primary focus on politics
- Sport: women's sports clubs/associations
- Training: groups with a primary focus on providing training
- Voluntary: a variety of voluntary organisations and clubs
- Youth: young women's groups/organisations

Table 2: Type of Rural Women's Groups and Organisations in NI

Type of Group	**Number of Groups/Organisations**
Business	9
Church	468
Community	207
Ethnic Minority	8
Farming	4
Politics	2
Sport	112
Training	1
Voluntary	222
Youth	205

This breakdown of groups by type reveals a number of interesting characteristics of current rural women's infrastructure in Northern Ireland:

- Church based women's groups are the largest type of women's group/organisation in Northern Ireland. 37.8% of all rural women's groups/organisations are local church groups. The vast majority of these groups are Protestant church groups, and most are Presbyterian Women's Associations and Mothers Unions (Church of Ireland). There is a smaller but significant number of Methodist Women in Ireland groups. There is no similar structured women's association in the Catholic Church in Ireland[4]. There are several rural inter church women's groups involving both Catholic and Protestant women and a few Baha'i and Muslim groups.

- The majority of the 222 groups in the voluntary category are Women's Institutes. However this category also includes a diverse range of voluntary groups including mothers groups, organisations addressing domestic violence, keep fit clubs and local branches of the Association of Loyal Orange Women.

- Most of the 207 community based groups are local women's groups[5]. Most are located in the west of Northern Ireland.

- Most of the 205 young women's groups are Girls Brigades. There are also significant numbers of Guides (both Girl Guides and Catholic Guides).

- Most of the 112 sports groups are women's Gaelic sports groups (Camogie Clubs and Ladies Gaelic Football Associations).

[4] However, informal groups of women meet for prayer and/or study within Roman Catholic Parishes.
[5] Including some town based Women's Centres that serve a rural hinterland

- There are very small numbers of business (e.g. Soroptimists, Women's Business Networks), ethnic minority, training and farming women's groups and organisations.

7.1.2 Infrastructure

(a) Regional Structures

The two main regional rural women's organisations are:

- The Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
- The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland

NIRWN is a newly established regional rural women's network, jointly funded by Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and Department of Social Development (DSD) under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme until June 2008. It offers strategic support to rural women across Northern Ireland. It is the rural part of a new infrastructure for the womens sector in line with the recommendations of the Government Review Report on Women's Organisations (DSD, 2005) – the Women's Centres Regional Partnership.

The work of the Network includes:

- 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, and;

- offering a training and capacity building programme to rural women across the region.

NIRWN states that it "hopes to become the voice of all rural women across Northern Ireland and to assist to local groups by helping bring their voices closer to decision makers"[6]. The Network aims to offer a strategic support system to rural women across Northern Ireland and aims to engage fully with all existing Women's Networks, women's groups and other organisations representing rural women.

With reference to the short term nature of the current funding of this key regional infrastructure for rural women, the Government Review Report on Women's Organisations stated that:

"Beyond 2008 DARD will seek to secure funding through the budgetary process or through internal reprioritization"

The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland is the regional body for Women's Institutes (WIs) in Northern Ireland. The Women's Institute describes it self as *"the largest non-political and non-sectarian organisation for women in Northern Ireland with some 7,000 members province-wide."*[7]

There are 181 WIs in Northern Ireland, mainly in rural areas. The WI aim is: *"To unite in promoting any work which makes for the betterment of our homes and the development and improvement of conditions in rural life, by providing a centre for educational activities and social intercourse."*

The Federation runs regional events, campaigns on issues that matter to women and their communities (such as reversing the decline in rural services), produces

[6] Source: Press Release on Launch of NIRWN.
[7] NI Women's Institute Website

its own in-house magazine the 'Ulster Countrywoman' each month, represents WINI as an affiliate of the Associated Countrywomen of the World (ACWW) and raises money to fund worldwide projects.

In addition to the two main regional rural women's organisations described above, rural women's groups and organisations often relate closely to other regional women's organisations that may not have an exclusively rural membership or focus. This includes organisations such as the Women's Resource and Development Agency, NI Women's Aid Federation, Northern Ireland Women's Forum and the regional headquarters of various youth, church and sporting bodies.

(b) Sub Regional Structures

The main sub regional rural women's organisations are:

- Rural Women's Networks
- Sub regional structures within church, sport and business groups.

There are six Rural Women's Networks in Northern Ireland:

- Fermanagh Women's Network
- Mid Ulster Women's Network
- Newry & Mourne Women's Network
- Omagh Women's Area Network
- Roe Valley Women's Network
- South Armagh Rural Women's Network

The Networks are membership based organisations established by women's groups in their sub regional areas.

Their work includes:

- providing support and capacity building to local women's groups
- networking and information sharing
- drop in information support centres
- local development support and funding advice
- health development
- training (with child care support)
- policy work[8]
- political awareness
- community relations work
- social economy projects
- organising special events such as International Women's Day

Example 1 below from the South Armagh Rural Women's Network Website provides a picture of the work of a Rural Women's Network.

Example 1: From South Armagh Rural Women's Network Website

We are a network comprising members from the various women's groups in South Armagh. We are a voluntary organisation and our committee members have worked for several years to establish the Network and finally the hard work paid off.

[8] For example, the Fermanagh Women's Network is currently working on a Gender Equality Strategy for County Fermanagh.

In August 2001, the Network office was opened and a Development Officer and an Administrator were employed. The representatives from the women's groups meet regularly to share ideas and information. They maintain a flow of information between their groups and the Network ensuring a 'ground-up' approach to the work the Network undertakes. This means that all our projects are based on what the women of South Armagh genuinely need. We work with women's groups and individual women in the South Armagh area providing a range of information, advice and support such as the following:

- *Contacts with a varied range of service and education providers, funders, local women's groups, community associations, etc*
- *Sharing a pool of information and experience gained by the existing women's groups- learning the best approach to help set up new groups and re-energise and focus existing groups.*
- *Information and advise on starting a group with personal visits and help with such issues as constitutions, committee structures, etc*
- *A signposting service as many of our enquiries require specialist guidance e.g. Women' Aid, Careers advice, etc.*
- *Resources such as booklets and leaflets on a wide range of women's issues, prospectuses from various colleges and centres of higher education, etc*
- *Personal visit and advice to any group who find themselves struggling as a third party is often an ideal way to solve any group conflict.*
- *Funding advice for groups who wish to apply for project costs help in choosing which funder and assistance with your applications. Also, ideas how your group can fundraise in your own area.*
- *Co-ordinating community based education by liaising with a range of various education providers in the area and by encouraging progression routes for those who have already completed classes.*
- *Grass roots easily accessible local support for women in south Armagh*
- *Cross border and cross community projects*
- *By communicating with all the women's groups we can ensure that local groups run different courses so a wider range of courses are available to the local women.*
- *All our advice and information is readily available to individual women and many of these enrol in classes or join in social events without feeling they have to join a women's group.*

The existing sub regional Rural Women's Networks do not cover all rural communities in Northern Ireland. Gaps in women's development structures have been identified in Antrim, North Armagh, North Down and South and West Tyrone and NIRWN is targeting the development of infrastructure in these areas.

"There is no rural women's network in this area and so there is a lack of networking opportunities for women's groups" (Interview)

However, the existing sub regional infrastructure of Rural Women's Networks is currently facing financial difficulties. The Networks exist through various short term funding packages.

"The Women's Networks have no funding and they support the groups on the ground –they[9] are just letting them disintegrate." (Interview)

For example, The Omagh Women's Area Network has had no core funding since March 2006, has reduced its staffing levels from 12 staff to 2 part time staff and its Drop In Centre and Network is facing closure in July 2007.

In spite of these challenges, the Networks continue to play a strategic support role at sub regional level. However, many of the existing Networks have had to shift from development work to project-based work due to lack of available funding. This has serious implications for the long term sustainability of the networks and their work in supporting and working with local women and groups in their areas.

It is not clear how any new sub regional infrastructures that may be developed by NIRWN in other 'gap' areas will be sustained either.

In addition to the Rural Women's Networks there are several other sub regional rural women's organisations with a specific focus on supporting and co-ordinating particular types of women's groups. This includes:

- Camogie and Ladies Gaelic Football County Structures
- Girl Guide Districts
- Mothers Union Diocesan Structures
- Rural Women in Business Networks
- WI Areas

In addition to the sub regional rural women's organisations described above, some rural women's groups and organisations relate closely to the sub regional network of Rural Support Networks (RSNs).

(c) Local Structures

The vast majority of the 1,238 rural women's groups and organisations in Northern Ireland are local groups.

There are no obvious geographical areas where there are no rural women's groups.

However, there is a pattern of mainly church based women's groups and less community based women's groups in predominantly Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist areas and mainly community based women's groups in predominantly Catholic/Nationalist/Republican areas.

In some places there is range of groups in one local community. Some villages have a Women's Institute, a Women's Group, a Mothers Union, a PWA, a Girls Brigade, Girl Guides, a Camogie Club and a Ladies Gaelic Football Club.

The baseline survey provided an indication of the nature of local women's

[9] funders

groups[10] and organisations. The main characteristics were as follows:

- Most of the groups had been established within the past 15 years. Many of the church groups had been established in the mid 20th century.

- The different types of group described their main purpose in different ways. Examples include:
    - *to provide educational and social opportunities for women in rural isolated areas*
    - *to help women access educational and learning opportunities giving them greater choices about their lives*
    - *to unite in promoting any work which makes for the betterment of our homes and the development and improvement of rural and urban life through social and educational activities*
    - *to provide support and venue where mothers can meet*
    - *to support business women and aspiring business women in the development of their business through networking opportunities and communication about matters relevant to their business*
    - *to promote the game of Camogie, promote sport, exercise and healthy living*
    - *to provide a Girl Guiding programme, arts & crafts, the environment, camping, hiking etc*
    - *to provide training, educational and social activities to women and provide childcare to enable women to attend.*
    - *to be specially concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life*
    - *to unite the women of our church in dedicating their lives to doing*

[10] 50% of returned surveys were from community based groups, 20% church based groups, 30% other groups (voluntary, youth, sport, farming and business)

God's service in the home the workplace, the community and the church

- *to share in the mission of the church and overseas through thought, prayer and financial support*
- *to provide a link with women from other churches*
- *A friendship club for farmers wives*
- *Promotion of social models of health*
- *To provide a holistic service to women and children who have experienced domestic violence including refuse accommodation, crèche, courses and support for women & children, advice provision etc.*
- *To help give rural women confidence to take their rightful place in the community. To help take them out of their isolated area and help them to mix. (Most of our women have directly or indirectly have been affected by the troubles in the loss of loved ones.)*
- *To support community based women's groups to achieve their objectives by providing advice, information, education and training opportunities in local venues*

Although groups had different priorities around sport, faith, peacebuilding, domestic violence, childcare or business, the common thread among respondents was a shared purpose of social, educational and community development.

- The community based women's groups tended to work with other community based women's groups, their sub regional Rural Women's Network and their RSN, and some work with local statutory organisations and NIRWN. Church based groups tend to work with other church based groups and the sub regional and regional structures of their group. Around 10% of respondents

indicated that they did not work with any other women's group/organisation.

- The vast majority of groups employed no staff. The few who did employ staff were divided between smaller groups that employed 1-5 full/part time staff, and larger project based groups that employed 6-20+ staff.

- The two most pressing issues for the groups were securing funding to sustain the group and engaging new, younger members/volunteers in the group[11].

- The main activities of groups[12] were;
    - social and recreational activities (69 groups)
    - arts and crafts (67 groups)
    - providing information (65 groups)
    - personal development (63 groups)
    - cross community work (61 groups)
    - community development (53 groups)
    - providing adult education and/or training (52 groups)

- A significant number of groups were involved in:
    - peace and reconciliation work (43 groups)
    - providing capacity building and support (36 groups)
    - cross border work (35 groups)
    - sports (34 groups)
    - lobbying and campaigning (33 groups)
    - equality between women and men (26 groups)
    - provision of childcare (25 groups)

[11] These two issues were also highlighted as major issues in the interviews and focus groups
[12] This pattern of activity was confirmed in the focus groups

- Fewer groups were active in:
    - faith development (24 groups)
    - addressing farming issues (16 groups)
    - business development (15 groups)
    - social economy projects (13 groups)
    - ethnic minorities work (16 groups)

- Very few groups were involved in:
    - addressing domestic violence/refuge provision (10 groups)
    - sexual orientation (6 groups)
    - politics (2 groups)

- Most of the groups had a membership of 20-30 women.[13]

- More than two thirds of the respondents saw their groups as contributing to rural development, mainly through building the confidence and skills of rural women to engage in the wider community. Examples of how groups saw their contribution to rural development are:

  "by supporting women to come together, build relationships and increase confidence to access jobs, possibilities and education"
  "..we empower rural women to address issues relevant to them, through training, capacity building, interaction and building on social capital by bringing services to local areas"

  "The vast majority of our clubs are based in rural areas and clubs generally are at the heart of the community. Many clubs are now developing their

[13] If the 1,238 groups identified in the baseline had 25 members each that would equate to 30,950 women. (Of course, some women may be a member of more than one group.)

facilities and grounds greatly which also contributes to rural development".

"Most members are affiliated to the farming community and have an interest in protecting their environment and supporting them in their struggles for a fair deal for their produce"

"By supporting and empowering women and their children to move on and contribute to their communities. Our crèche is use by large rural area."

"We are all rural women living in the country, who know and love the countryside and our wish is to help in our rural area in anyway possible to make our countryside a better place to live in. People are starting to get involved with different things in the area that they would not have taken part in during "the Troubles" e.g. fun day, youth club, bowling club".

- Of the groups that answered the question regarding the group's income in the past year, most had an income of £0-£5000. Income was generated mainly through grant aid, fundraising events and donations/membership fees[14].

- Most groups' income had either stayed the same or increased in the past three years.
- The vast majority of groups indicated that their group's funding was not secure in the next three years.

7.1.3 Social Capital

Definitions of social capital vary, but the main aspects include citizenship,

[14] Many groups, particularly church based groups, do not access grant aid and are sustained through membership fees and fundraising activities alone.

'neighbourliness', social networks and civic participation. The term "social capital" is most closely associated with political scientist Robert Putnam and: *"refers to the nature and extent of one's involvement in various informal networks and formal civic organizations. From chatting with neighbours or engaging in recreational activities to joining environmental organizations and political parties, social capital in this sense is used as a conceptual term to characterize the many and varied ways in which a given community's members interact… it is important to recognize that social capital is not a single entity, but is rather multidimensional in nature."(Grootaert, Christiaan, et al. World Bank Working Paper No. 18: Measuring Social Capital. The World Bank, Washington, D.C.*)

There are many different questionnaires and matrices that have been developed to measure social capital such as the National Statistics Social Capital Matrix of Surveys. These include questions that attempt to assess dimensions of social capital such as:

- Groups and Networks
- Trust and Solidarity
- Collective Action and Co-operation
- Information and Communication
- Social Cohesion and Inclusion
- Empowerment and Political Action

There is clear evidence that rural women's groups and organisations are contributing to social capital within local communities under all of these dimensions. This includes high levels of volunteering contributing to social capital and a contribution to trust and social cohesion in local communities.

The aspect of social capital in which many groups are less active is political empowerment.

An important issue in relation to social capital in Northern Ireland is with regard to wider social cohesion across the sectarian divide. While many groups are contributing to social capital within separate Protestant and Catholic communities and many of the groups are also active in developing cross community contact and understanding, the mainly single identity nature of separate structures does not contribute to wider social cohesion or 'bridging' social capital.

As Derek Bacon puts it:

"For generations these Catholic and Protestant communities have been assembling their own social service infrastructure, often centered on the church. This has contributed to their internal solidarity. It has also reinforced social distance from the other (Douglas, 1997). There is a high level of intra-community trust within each of the two communities which has, notoriously, generated a similar level of inter-community distrust and intolerance. Strong localised trust and dense multifunctional ties, associated with 'bonding' or 'within-group' social capital, have been built up within each religious subculture generally at the cost of thin impersonal trust of strangers and weak ties that are associated with 'bridging' or 'between-group' social capital."

(From: Revitalising civil society in Northern Ireland: social capital formation in three faith-based organisations , Derek Bacon, 2001)

However, with a level of experience of cross community interaction among many rural women's groups and organisations, there is the potential for the rural women's groups and organisations to play an important role in 'bridging social capital' between the two larger communities in rural Northern Ireland.

7.1.4 Wider Rural Community Development

A common view expressed throughout the qualitative research was that in addition to groups run by women for women, rural women also play a central role as active volunteers within local community development groups and voluntary organisations[15].

There was a perception that in the past ten years there has been change in rural community development, with a higher number of women than men now actively involved in local community groups, whereas it had been previously been the other way around. One indicator highlighted was a change from mainly men to mainly women undertaking rural community development training courses.

Many respondents expressed a strong desire that this issue should be reflected in the findings of the research. This is clearly an important finding – women are not under represented in rural community development. However, as the number of women and men involved in wider community development groups and organisations was not the focus of this research, this issue may require further research and examination.

7.1.5 Gap Analysis

A substantial regional, sub regional and local infrastructure of rural women's groups and organisations currently exists.
However the following gaps/weaknesses have been identified:

- The whole of the current infrastructure is insecure as it relies heavily on short term funding.

  "The Networks and local groups survive on a shoe string budget…some are surviving on a month to month basis- they are still active even with reduced

[15] This was in contrast with the view that women were generally less involved at a strategic or Board level.

money , they haven't closed their doors" (Focus Groups)

- The existing sub regional infrastructure of Rural Women's Networks is currently facing serious problems with financial sustainability.

- There are geographical gaps in terms of sub regional rural women's support networks in Antrim, North Armagh, North Down and South and West Tyrone. NIRWN has a strategic role in addressing the gap in these areas.

- There are generally parallel infrastructures involving mainly Catholic and mainly Protestant women.

- Many local groups are facing difficulties in securing funding to sustain their group and in engaging new, younger members/volunteers.

- There is a less activity in addressing farming issues, business development, social economy projects and ethnic minorities work.

- There is a low level of activity that is addressing domestic violence[16], sexual orientation[17] and politics.

- Several interviewees referred to a lack of cohesion and within the current rural women's infrastructure while others felt it was no less cohesive than any other sector

7.2 Rural Diversity

[16] Some interviewees indicated that domestic violence is one of the biggest issues facing rural women.

Of those respondents to the baseline survey who answered the question 'Do you monitor the level of diversity within your group?'-

- 40% answered 'yes'
- 60% answered 'no'.

7.2.1 Divided Rural Communities

Generally groups are organised separately in terms of the sectarian divide with Protestant women in the church based women's groups and mainly Catholic women in the community based women's groups.

However, community based women's groups do also exist in some predominantly Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist areas, involving mainly Protestant women.

Youth and sports based groups also tend to be organised within separate religious/cultural communities and are predominantly Catholic or Protestant. For example, Girls Brigades are mainly Protestant and Presbyterian and Camogie Clubs are mainly Catholic.
Of those respondents who answered the question on community background in the baseline survey, the majority indicated that their members/participants were predominantly (70% or more) from one community background.

This finding was reflected in the views expressed in focus groups and interviews:

"Groups are divided between unionist and nationalist – the separation is like apartheid!" (Comment in Regional Leaders Focus Group)

[17] Respondents indicated that rural women access support through urban based lesbian support services.

However there was also a significant minority of integrated groups (groups with a mix of members/participants from both community backgrounds with ratios of between 35/65 - 50/50).

There are parallel and often unconnected rural women's infrastructures within Protestant and Catholic communities. There is limited awareness, networking and collaboration across the separate infrastructures. However, there is a level of cross community contact for many groups at a sub regional and regional level. Some of those consulted believed that women are more likely to engage in cross community interaction than men:

"Women can cross the sectarian divide more easily than men" (Regional Leaders Focus Group)

The majority of respondents to the baseline survey indicated that they were engaged in cross community work.

Of those respondents who answered the question 'Does your group have links with groups from a different community background?' -

- 59% answered 'yes'
- 41% answered 'no'.

There is also evidence of different ways of organising. Most community based women's groups are linked into the wider community/voluntary sector networks and access funding through grant aid.

Most Protestant church groups are not members of community/voluntary sector networks and are generally sustained through membership fees and fundraising events.

However there are similarities in terms of shared aims of social and educational development and shared common activities such as arts and crafts and social and recreational activities.

7.2.2 Section 75 Groupings

Respondents to the baseline survey were asked to estimate the percentage of their members/participants and committee from each of the Section 75 categories.

From the answers provided the following trends were identified:

(a) Age

The majority of participants and committee members were over the age of 50[18]. There was a significantly lower participation of women under 25 and the vast majority of groups had no women under 25 on their committee.

This lower participation of younger women was explored further in the Local Participants Focus Group.

[18] This was confirmed in the response to the question asking what was the most pressing issue for the group – many groups responded that a difficulty in engaging younger women was a major issue.

In answer to the question 'why are less younger women getting involved?' the participants commented:

- *A lot of younger women are working and don't have time*
- *Younger women don't want responsibility especially with increased legislation and procedures around finance and child protection*
- *There are fewer women in the churches*
- *Younger women live a more independent life*
- *Younger women are more concerned about child safety and so they spend more time transporting their children*
- *Some women are afraid to get involved – "stuck in a rut" and don't have the confidence to get involved*
- *Parent peer pressure – there are too many kids activities to be taken to*

Some participants commented that their group had an 'older image' and did not do things younger women are interested in.

(b) Dependents

The majority of participants and committee members had dependents who are children. A smaller number had dependents that were elderly or have a disability.

(c) Marital Status

The vast majority of participants in groups and committee members were married or living with a partner. There were much smaller numbers of single people or widows involved, generally less than 20% of any group. In the vast majority of

groups there were very few (less than 10%) of members/participants who are divorced or separated.

(d) Politics

The political and religious diversity of groups was explored through the questions around community background and the findings are presented in 7.2.1.

(e) Religion

Less than a third of survey respondents answered the question on the percentage of participants and committee members who were perceived as neither Catholic nor Protestant. Most of these groups responded that between 0-10% of participants and committee members were perceived as neither Catholic nor Protestant. The most common answer for participants was 0%.

(f) Race

Less than a third of survey respondents answered the question on the percentage of participants and committee members who were from an Ethnic Minority Group. Most of these groups responded that between 0-10% of participants and committee members were from ethnic minorities.
The most common answer for participants and committee members from ethnic minorities was 0%.

(g) Sexual Orientation

Less than a third of survey respondents answered the question on the percentage of participants and committee members who were heterosexuals. The vast majority of groups (all except 4 groups) answered that 100% of their participants were heterosexuals.
The vast majority of groups (all except 2 groups) answered that 100% of their committee members were heterosexuals.

(h) Disability

Less than a half of survey respondents answered the question on the percentage of participants and committee members who had disability. Most of these groups responded that between 0-25% of participants and between 0-20% of committee members had a disability.

7.2.3 Gap Analysis

The survey indicates significant gaps in participation by women who:

- are under 25
- are divorced or separated
- are neither Protestant nor Catholic
- are from an ethnic minority group
- are lesbian
- have a disability

The survey also indicates that many local rural women's groups reflect the divided nature of Northern Ireland society.

"It's not enough to say we are open – we need to go out and get people involved" (Regional Leaders Focus Group)

7.3 Rural Women and Community Representation

The research included a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the representation of rural women on key rural development and community organisations.

7.3.1 The Membership and Level Of Women On Key Rural Development Organisations and Community Organisations

The membership and level of women on key rural development organisations and community organisations in Northern Ireland was included in the recently published report "The Grass Ceiling: Audit of Women in Rural Areas in the North of Ireland" (Marie Crawley, WRDA, 2006).

The key findings in relation to rural women and community representation on key rural development organisations and community organisations were as follows:

- There is a lack of women in senior positions within DARD and on the Rural Stakeholder Forum (RSF)[19].

- There were 13 men and 4 women on the RSF Rural Development Sub Group.

[19] There were 18 men and 3 women on the Rural Stakeholder Forum

- 59% of grade 6/7 employees in DARD in rural areas are women.

- Of the 6 LEADER Groups out of 13 that provided information, there were 54 men and 36 women on the Boards of LEADER Groups.

- There were 9 men and 3 women on the Board of the Rural Development Council.[20]

- The Rural Community Network has more women than men on its Board (12 women and 11 men).

- There are more women than men on the Boards of RSNs (84 women and 69 men). There are twice as many male Chairs as female, three times as many women Secretaries as men and no notable difference in the position of Treasurer.

- The majority of RSN staff are women; 30 women and 11 men in development posts and 21 women and 1 man in administration posts.

- There is a significant under representation of women on the Boards of Local Strategy Partnerships in rural Northern Ireland.

- Large special interest organisations that play an important role in social and cultural life of rural communities, such as the GAA and the Orange Order are male dominated in terms of decision making.

The 'Grass Ceiling' report also highlighted the situation outside of rural development

and community organisations which sets the rural development dimension in context.

Key findings included:

- Women are significantly under represented as elected representatives in the NI Assembly, among rural MLAs and on rural local authorities (17.8% of elected councillors in rural areas are women).

- The two key agencies relating to employment in local government are overwhelmingly male dominated.

- Women are significantly under represented on Education and Library Boards and on the Boards of Further Education colleges

Several interviewees referred to the recent appointment of a woman as the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development as a significant development.
This baseline research also analysed the gender make up of the current[21] staff teams of the Rural Development Council and the Rural Community Network. The main findings of this analysis were as follows:

- The RCN staff team was predominantly female; 19 women and 6 men

- The RDC staff team was predominantly female; 18 women and 8 men

- The Chief Executives of both organisations were men

- There were men and women in senior management teams of both

[20] The Chairperson of RDC is a woman
[21] According to the staff listed on the organisations' websites in June 2007

organisations

- All administration staff in both organisations were women.

7.3.2 Key Issues

Issues relating to rural women and community representation were explored in the qualitative parts of this research.

A number of key issues emerged:

(a) Under representation of women in strategic decision making roles

Most of those consulted indicated that while women make up the majority of those actively involved in local rural community development, there is a minority of women in senior/decision making positions in key rural development organisations.
"It's mainly men a the regional level, but in local groups it's the reverse" (Interview)

"It's poor- there are a lot of women working at administration level and at front line level – with housing estate projects and in direct contact with community groups. But at policy level I think the representation and influence of women is seriously lacking." (Interview)

There is generally a greater gender balance on Boards of community and voluntary sector organisations, although the Chair or Director role is more likely to be filled by a man.

However, within rural development in general, as the level of policy making, strategic responsibility, budget, economic development and political power increases, the level

of women's representation decreases.

"The representation of women is not there…it is a 'grass ceiling'…women are not moving out of their groups and taking it to the next level in terms of decision making" (Interview)

"…it is, or appears to be, a traditionally male dominated area of work. DARD has traditionally been an 'old boys' network perceived structure and as Rural Development sits within DARD it is possible that this might have created a perception." (Interview)

"As time goes on I am more and more disheartened at how few women are represented at a high level…and even fewer rural women, especially working class rural women. I am the only female on the board…where is the gender equality here? However women do not put themselves forward for these roles and this in itself is a major problem" (interview)

(b) Lack of younger women

Interviewees and focus group participants consistently indicated a lack of younger women volunteering and taking on leadership roles in local women's groups and organisations.

Many of the women who are currently on Boards had developed their knowledge, confidence and skills initially at this level before taking on sub regional or regional responsibilities. They expressed concern at who would take their place, when they retire, because they saw so few younger women becoming involved and they felt younger women were often reluctant to take on leadership responsibilities.

(c) Dominant Culture

Interviewees and focus group participants highlighted a major barrier to a greater gender balance as the dominant 'male culture' of meetings. This includes feeling intimidated due to a formal/traditional style of meetings and experiencing men persistently dominating discussions.

"…the format of committee meetings is very traditional, very male in their structure and running – formal, going through the Chair etc. This isn't very appealing to women and for some they opt out…there needs to be a discussion around the formality of meetings that is off-putting. There are formalities that have to be there but I think there is room for flexibility…changing a culture of how rural development is delivered" (Interview)

Characteristics of this culture mentioned included:

- Formality in the style and structure of meetings

- A lack of induction and support for new Board members

- A 'pretend to know' as opposed to 'just ask' approach to a lack of knowledge of key issues, jargon etc

  "The highly educated people seem to talk all the time and they talk way above your head…they need to discuss things in ordinary language – they need to be educated to speak at a more basic level" (Interview)

- Chairing that allows a few of the same men to dominate all discussions

- Adversarial or confrontational approaches to conflict as opposed to

problem solving approaches

"It takes confidence to overcome your fears and voice your opinion. It's intimidating as you get the impression these meetings are just for tough people." (Interview)

"You have to become like a man to get things done -take on male culture and adopt their attitudes" (Interview)

- Greater attention to task than to process and relationships
- Limited awareness, training or understanding of gender issues
- Recruitment processes designed and implemented by mainly men

Some of those consulted believed this dominant culture was also intimidating for many men as well.

Some interviewees described particularly negative experiences of being undermined or insulted in and around meetings because of their gender where they were in a very small minority. They generally experienced a lack of open support from other Board members in such situations, resulting in such behaviour remaining unchallenged.

"I had very little support, I felt and was very much on my own...the work load really cut into my family time, I don't believe there was or is the recognition of these issues that face women" (Interview)

However most interviewees described a more positive experience where they felt they had received a good induction, had been encouraged, not marginalised and had found

their Board a very comfortable place to be involved.

"I've had no bad experiences or worries. I feel listened to on the Boards I sit on" (Interview)
"It's very positive - I think I have equal status to the males and if I can't attend meeting due to family commitments I am informed of the working of the committee in my absence." (Interview)

There are a few examples of some key rural development organisations developing a different approach to meetings that resulted in a fuller participation of women.

"RCN and the regional networks have always promoted the ideal of a gender balanced Board and RDC have also endeavoured to increase the representation of women on their structures but I think in the larger statutory organisations there has been less of an effort made to address the issue of equality." (Interview)
RCN developed a successful strategy to increase the representation of women on its Board. It also developed informal support and mentoring of new women members and varied the style of its meetings to include small group discussions.

"Some years ago, RCN developed a strategy to address the under representation of women on its Board. It was a three pronged approach of personal contact, training and affirmative action. They asked other bodies to nominate a female, the Chair and Director visited the RSNs AGMs and encouraged women to get involved and there was a lot of informal talking afterwards. The Board undertook gender training. This produced a gradual change and the Board became a place where women felt comfortable…women on the Board quietly supported new women who came on board." (Interview)

(d) Barriers to greater representation

Interviewees and focus group participants also highlighted the following barriers to greater representation of women:

- Lack of support[22] for and access to childcare for women taking on these responsibilities.

- Limited time available to women due to child care and other work and domestic responsibilities, particularly for younger women.

  "It's that old saying - time and convenience. Rural women have the experience of rural issues but often don't have time to devote to things like sitting on Boards" (Interview)

- The timing and location of meetings are often arranged to suit the majority of (male) Board members, making it difficult for women with caring responsibilities to participate in, for example, early morning or early evening meetings.

  "Often we are in the minority. Often we have to remind others that the timing of meetings is not always convenient. I have young children and meetings often clash with family time. Distance to meetings is often a problem too – we often have to travel for an hour to go to Belfast only to find that half the audience have also travelled from this direction to attend the same meeting." (Interview)

- Lack of accessible transport for some women.

  "What support is there? Transport was and still is disastrous – childcare is

practically non existent, apart from where some women have come together to set something up" (Interview)

- Lack of personal confidence of some women, particularly in traditionally male dominated environments

  "Women don't have confidence because we have been told that what we do is not as valuable as what men do" (Regional Leaders Focus Group)

  "Many women are not confident. It's a traditional thing in rural areas – women don't put themselves forward – it's not something you would do- it's a cultural thing, but younger women are changing this" (Interview)

- Lack of skills and capacity of some women.

  "Women need support at the application stage of filling in a form to apply to be on a public body…they are not good at selling themselves. If a women has been at home for years and hasn't had a job interview for years she will need assistance" (Interview)

- Lack of role models

- Lack of strategies and systems within bodies to address under representation

  "Boards need to value women. We need to be listened to, to be enabled to participate. There needs to be encouragement - a process for engaging that brings out the best in you" (Interview)

[22] such as childcare allowances

(e) Alternative Ways of Influencing

Some interviewees believed there were alternative ways of women influencing decisions rather than being represented or attempting to participate on Boards.

"Why try to participate in more places where you are not listened to!" (Interview)

"Are we hung up on representation? Contribution can be broader than representation and women may want to make a contribution rather then be a representative" (Interview)

(f) Support

Interviewees and focus group participants indicated a need for mentoring, role models and support for women to take on leadership roles on Boards of key rural development organisations.

(g) Slow Pace of Change

Many of those consulted expressed frustration that they had repeatedly highlighted these barriers (described above) for many years and yet there has been very little change. This frustration or sense of not being listened to was in itself becoming a major barrier.

For example some questioned why it was so difficult to do something as simple as

change a meeting time to ensure women can equally participate.

Previous research studies on women in rural communities in Northern Ireland in the past ten years have highlighted many of the same issues. For example here is an extract of recommendations from RCN's Gender Proofing CAP Reform Partnership published in 2002:

1. Provision of adequate childcare / eldercare should be prioritised and promoted to all rural dwellers. Rural development initiatives should consider imaginative childcare provisions as exemplified by the cross-border childcare project, and existing health board provision should be documented and promoted.

2. Subsidised childcare provision for farm families should be considered as it could reduce the level of child accidents on farms and relieve some of the associated stress.

3. There is scope to promote childcare provision as a useful employment opportunity.

4. The provision of good transport facilities for rural communities is essential. The exact nature of the need which has been identified requires further research.

It is interesting that many of the issues around community representation of rural women that are raised in this baseline research were reflected in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture publication "Women active in Rural Development" in 2000. An extract is given below.

Extract: "Women Active in Rural Development", European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture in 2000.

Decision-making at local level –women's participation is a must

This section addresses development organisations and professional associations, as well as local and regional authorities. They are asked to actively encourage and support women in planning and decision-making, both as members of management boards and committees and at senior staffing levels. Aspects that could usefully be reviewed, with an eye to gender-orientation, include:

- *organisational culture and structure;*

- *recruitment procedure and promotion of staff;*
- *terms and conditions of employment (working time);*
- *the selection and nomination of board and committee members;*
- *procedures used for making decisions;*
- *the timing and location of meetings and events.*

At local, regional and national level special steps could be taken:

- *the establishment of associations and networks of rural women;*
- *the involvement of existing women's associations in committees and partnerships;*
- *encouraging women's groups to apply for funding for development initiatives;*
- *linking up women's associations with development organisations;*
- *enhancing mainstreaming projects in existing organisations;*
- *informing women's associations and networks about available rural development programmes and projects.*

As a lack of spare time is a reason frequently given by rural women for their not being more involved, every effort should be made to eradicate obstacles and ensure their participation. It may be necessary to provide transport and childcare facilities, and men may need encouraging to take more responsibility for family tasks.

7.3.3 Gap Analysis

There are significant gaps that need to be addressed. The main gaps identified are:

- Women are significantly under represented as elected representatives in the NI Assembly, among rural MLAs and on rural local authorities.

- Women are significantly under represented on Education and Library Boards and on the Boards of Further Education colleges.

- Women are significantly under represented on the Boards of Local Strategy Partnerships in rural Northern Ireland.

- There is a lack of women in senior positions within DARD, on the Rural Stakeholder Forum (RSF) including the RSF Rural Development Sub Group.

- Women are under represented on the Boards of LEADER Groups.

- Women are under represented on the Board of the Rural Development Council.

- Women are under represented as Chairs of the Boards of RSNs.

- Men are under represented on the staff of RDC, RCN and the RSNs, apart from at the Chief Executive level.

7.4 Project Activity

7.4.1 Community Development Projects

The main community development project currently active where the key beneficiaries are rural women's groups/organisations is the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme.

The Rural Women's Sectoral Programme was funded to a total of £400,000, 75% by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development under EU BSP programme measure 4.6 and 25% from the International Fund for Ireland.

The programme centres around women's participation and involvement in rural community development and their under representation at decision making levels within this.

The Rural Women's Sectoral Programme resulted from a consortium application between six Rural Women's Networks :

- South Armagh Rural Women's Network
- Fermanagh Women's Network
- Mid Ulster Women's Network
- Newry & Mourne Women's Network
- Omagh Women's Area Network
- Roe Valley Women's Network
- and the Women's Research and Development Agency (WRDA)
- and the Rural Community Network (RCN).

The aims of the programme were:

- To support all stages of development of rural women's organisations and promote the active involvement of rural women in Rural Development and wider policy.
- To support the development of rural women's projects throughout rural NI, and to specifically focus on areas where there is little or no activity.
- To develop a number of social/economic/environmental projects with, for and by rural women that contributes to the regeneration of local communities.

- To identify the development needs of rural women and through a multi agency approach provide appropriate responses.
- To ensure that women from all traditions of rural NI are actively engaged in the process and the management of the process

The programme included small grant (up to £7,500) distribution to women's groups across rural Northern Ireland for project costs.

Rural women's groups and organisations can also benefit from other generic community development projects where they may not be identified as the key beneficiaries. This includes support from RSNs, local Councils and LSPs. In some of these examples, women's groups may not be identified as key beneficiaries, but the needs of women may be considered and/or prioritised.

For example, an 'Audit of the Needs of Women and Action Plan' was developed by Coleraine Borough Council in 2005 in the context of its Community Support Plan.

This identified needs including a need to support the local Women's Forum, to develop the capacity of local womens' groups and to increase the active participation of women.

Another example is the Cookstown LSP, which, following a Social Inclusion Audit in 2004, appointed the Positive Steps Women's Group to employ a researcher to identify the strategic issues facing women in the Cookstown District Council area and make recommendations to the LSP Board. This is an extensive research project entitled the 'Women's Empowerment Initiative'[23]. The LSP has also prioritised Women's Issues

[23] The findings of this research are due to be published later this year.

as one its areas of interest for strategic interventions under Peace II Extension.

7.4.2 Gap Analysis

The existence of the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme means there is not a gap in this area at present[24].

However given the findings of the baseline, there were gaps in the make up of the consortium that developed the application such as the church, youth and sports based rural women's groupings.

Comments in the Regional Leaders Focus Group included:

"There is a division between the women's groups and church women's groups infrastructure – there is no cross over – NIRWN is trying to draw the sector together."

"The PWA is encouraging women to get involved on a wider basis – we want to get more involved in the community".

These groupings may not traditionally have had a community development focus and may not have been regarded, or regard themselves, as part of the rural 'women's sector'. However, they clearly offer substantial social capital if they wish to increase their engagement in community development activities alongside their more traditional activities.

"We identified a lack of rural women's infrastructure in this area, but when we tried

[24] However some consultees felt the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme could have made better use of the resources available

to develop it people weren't interested. We need to look at how women participate in civic life – all women in various forums such as churches. Women are involved in so many organisations so it's unfair just to identify women's groups" (Interview)

7.5 Information for Rural Women

7.5.1 Information Sources

The main information source types identified through the baseline survey were newsletters, websites, magazines, leaflets, local newspapers and word of mouth.

Specific examples of the sources of information highlighted included:

- NICVA news
- CWSAN newsletter
- Emails from Newry and Mourne Women Ltd
- RCN newsletters
- Mailings from Positive Steps in Cookstown
- Church/Parish bulletins
- Fermanagh District Council newsletter
- Community Change Information
- Guides Website
- Sure Start South Armagh
- Invest NI
- Women Into Politics
- Women's Network mailing
- DARD NI
- Mid Ulster Women's Network
- GAA and Camogie Websites

- Methodist Women's District Committee
- Homestart
- Down Volunteer Bureau
- Council CR mail shot
- Rotary
- COSTA
- NIPPA
- Strabane District Council
- Strabane & District Community Network
- PWA Office Church House
- WI Magazine - 'The Ulster Countrywoman' and Website
- Mothers Union website
- Methodist Newsletter
- MWI Website
- Missionary Information
- Women & Family Health Initiative
- Childcare Partnership
- Diocesan Magazine
- SARWN Newsletter
- NIRWN newsletter
- CDHN newsletter
- Advice NI
- Law Centre
- Housing Rights Service

The main information sources identified were local newspapers, NICVA, RCN, RSNs, Rural Women's Networks, regional and headquarter voluntary/church/youth/sport organisations and local Councils.

7.5.2 Gap Analysis

There are no clear information gaps for rural women's community development support.

However, there is evidence that many WIs, church, youth and sports groups do not generally access information outside of their own organisational networks,

7.6 Skills Analysis of rural women

7.6.1 Management Committees Skills

In the baseline survey groups were asked to identify the most important skills on their management committee.

The main skills identified by respondents were:

- financial skills (including fundraising)
- organisational skills
- communication skills
- planning and management skills
- committee skills
- leadership skills
- interpersonal skills

Groups were also asked to identify what additional skills they needed on their

management committee. The main skills identified were around finance and funding and included fundraising skills, accountancy skills, skills in accessing funding, making funding applications and skills in meeting funders monitoring requirements.

Other additional skills identified by groups were:

- computer skills
- PR/promotional skills (to reach out to attract more participants)
- business skills
- group work skills

However, it was interesting that a significant number of respondents, when answering this question did not identify skills. A significant number of respondents indicated that they did not need any additional skills on their committee and highlighted other more pressing needs. For example, one respondent wrote:

"Skill levels are more than adequate – we need access to equipment i.e. photocopier on a regular basis and have to beg, steal and borrow facilities"

Other needs, rather than skills, which were highlighted including:

- *Enhanced vision*
- *Youth!*
- *More women who can devote more time to planning.*
- *Involvement from ethnic minorities*
- *Staff*
- *Ideas*
- *Just need new members with new thinking and perspectives*
- *A magician with a wand that would guarantee core funding*
- *Someone who has time to complete funding applications. Our group is all volunteers who work full time or have family commitments*
- *Willing workers*

- *People with time on their hands and younger members*

7.6.2 Skills of Rural Women in Political Positions and Public Bodies

Interviewees in political positions and public bodies identified skills such as:

- communication skills
- public speaking and presentations skills
- questioning and critiquing skills

They also identified a need for specific skills and techniques to ensure their views and opinions as a woman were heard, valued and influential in a male dominated environment.

"Women need additional skills to deal with tokenism such as strategic techniques for handling situations such as having your contributions ignored or having your contribution omitted from minutes of meetings" (Regional Leaders Focus Group)
"I'm not sure about skills but a first step would be able to question decisions made by men" (Interview)

Again, other needs rather than skills were also identified. In addition to skills interviewees identified experience, knowledge and awareness of rural community development, public bodies and policy as important.

"Rural women need to value themselves and make their views known. They also need to learn how to take on board other ways of doing things and recognise that change is often a good thing. They need to train themselves to have more influence" (Interview)

Confidence and self esteem were also regarded as important factors as well as

having your contribution valued by others.

"You need self esteem – to accept and understand that you have a valid contribution to make" (Interview)

Several interviewees also referred to the need for additional skills for men in political positions/public bodies including greater gender and community development awareness and good chairing skills including skills to create an open and informal working atmosphere in meetings.
"There are a lot of middle aged, middle class men involved at this level and I have learned that many of them do not actually know what they are talking about when it comes to particular social issues. They have no concept of poverty, rural isolation, child rearing etc…In my opinion any rural woman has many skills to offer as representatives on public bodies. They have learned from experience, they know what matters instinctively and as long as they can communicate well there should be no difficulties" (Interview)

7.6.3 Gap Analysis

Survey respondents did not identify a significant skills gap on current management committees. However additional skills required that were identified were mainly around finance, funding/fundraising, PR and computer skills.

The barriers mentioned in 7.3.2 are more significant factors than skills gaps in the lower representation of women in political and public bodies.

"I think women need to have the same skills as men in this arena but the barriers to their participation are the key areas that will need to be addressed. It is possible that the organisations don't provide childcare/carers' allowance, hold

meetings at 'family' times etc and that these may be barriers…" (Interview)

Most skills required for these positions are not exclusive to women.

"Yes, there are skill gaps, but these are not exclusive to women. To participate effectively in a committee it's important to have good communication skills…You need to be comfortable and familiar with meetings and you need technical skills about rural development, structure and frameworks" (Interview)

Particular skills required for political positions and public bodies are communication skills, public speaking and presentations skills and questioning and critiquing skills. Knowledge and experience were regarded as important as skills.

"A whole range and package of skills are needed. Firstly, confidence and esteem issues need to be addressed, Women have to believe that they have something to offer and what they have is worth something. They also need to understand how public bodies work and how policy works and how it's linked to everyday life. They need lobbying skills and skills to participate." (Interview)

Specific skills gaps for women are the skills required to make your views and opinions listened to in a male dominated culture/environment.

7.7 Support Needs

7.7.1 Community Development Support and Enterprise Development Support

In the baseline survey groups were asked to identify the organisations that provide

their group with support. This produced an extensive list of rural, women's, voluntary, community and statutory sector organisations that included:

- Business Women's Network NI
- CFNI
- Children in Northern Ireland
- Church Women's Groups HQs (PWA, Mothers Union, MWI)
- Councils
- CRC
- DARD
- Early Years Organisations: Playboard, NIPPA, Surestart etc
- Education & Library Boards
- Funders (Peace Funding, Awards for All, Lottery etc)
- Guides HQ
- Health Trusts
- Institutes of Further Education
- Invest NI
- Irish School of Ecumenics
- Ladies Gaelic Football Assoc – head office and Ulster GAA
- Local Churches
- Local Community Associations
- LSPs
- NICVA
- NIHE
- NIRWN
- PSNI
- RCN
- RDC
- RSNs
- Rural Women's Networks

- Training for Women's Network
- Voluntary Organisations (e.g. WEA, Age Concern, Barnardo's, Derry/Raphoe Action)
- Women's Aid
- Women's Institute HQ
- Women Into Politics
- WRDA

The focus was generally more on community development support than enterprise support.

A small number of groups indicated that they were provided with no support.

Community development and enterprise development support agencies consulted indicated that most of the support they offered is generic community development and enterprise development support rather than particularly targeting rural women's groups. Most respondents indicated that they did not have particular support programmes targeting rural women's groups/organisations.

They saw the main support needs of rural women's groups/organisations as:

- Funding
- Capacity building
- Sign posting
- Training
- Communication
- Access to and ability to use IT
- Childcare services and support
- Access to information about developmental opportunities

There is some enterprise support in rural areas that targets women but this is more focused on individual women rather than groups.

For example, the Fermanagh Enterprise Agency is one the rural enterprise agencies that runs the WRAISE (Women In Rural Areas And Investment in Self Employment)[25] programme targeted specially at women who want to explore enterprise. The Fermanagh Enterprise Agency and is also running a 'Start Your Own Business' Course specially targeted at women.

Several interviewees highlighted a need for more pre enterprise programmes that are targeted at women to encourage and build confidence to think about self employment and setting up a business.

7.7.2 Gap Analysis

Survey respondents and interviewees identified support gaps including:

- a long term and sustainable support infrastructure
- funding to sustain rural women's networks
- a collective rural women's voice
- networking opportunities
- more campaigning support
- helping women to access positions of power and responsibility in society
- a rural women's group directory
- more continuous and less one off enterprise support programmes

[25] WRAISE is a cross sectoral partnership to develop an innovative methodology for supporting women in rural areas to start and run their own businesses successfully.

- child care provision/ support for rural women interested in setting up their own business

8 Conclusions

The main conclusions of the research are as follows:

8.1 The research identified a total of 1,238 rural women's groups and organisations in Northern Ireland.

8.2 Most of these groups are church based women's groups (mainly Presbyterian Women's Associations and Mothers Unions), Women's Institutes, Community Based Women's Groups, Young Women's Groups (mainly Girls Brigades and Guides) and Sports Groups (mainly Women's Gaelic Sports).

8.3 There are very few business, ethnic minority, training and farming women's groups and organisations.

8.4 A substantial regional, sub regional and local infrastructure of rural women's groups and organisations currently exists and this is a significant component of social capital in rural communities.

8.5 The whole of the current infrastructure is insecure as it relies heavily on short term funding.

8.6 The existing sub regional infrastructure of Rural Women's Networks is currently facing serious problems with financial sustainability.

8.7 There are geographical gaps in terms of sub regional rural women's support in Antrim, North Armagh, North Down and South and West Tyrone.

8.8 Many local groups are facing difficulties in securing grants and/or fundraising to sustain their group and in engaging new, younger members/volunteers.

8.9 Most groups have a shared purpose of social, educational and community development.

8.10 The main activities of the groups are social and recreational activities, arts and crafts, providing information, personal development, cross community work, community development and providing adult education and/or training.

8.11 There is less activity in addressing farming issues, business development, social economy projects and ethnic minorities work and there is a low level of activity that is addressing domestic violence, sexual orientation and politics.

8.12 There are parallel and often unconnected rural women's infrastructures within Protestant and Catholic communities and limited awareness, networking and collaboration across the separate infrastructures. However, there is a level of cross community contact for many groups at a sub regional and regional level and potential for rural women's groups and organisations to play a role in 'bridging social capital' between the two communities in rural Northern Ireland.

8.13 There are low levels of participation in groups by women who are under 25, who are divorced or separated, who are neither Protestant nor Catholic, who are from an ethnic minority group, who are lesbian or who have a disability.

8.14 Women play a central role as active volunteers within local rural community development groups and voluntary organisations

8.15 Rural women are significantly under represented as elected representatives in the NI Assembly, among rural MLAs, on rural local authorities, on key education bodies and on the Boards of LSPs.

8.16 Rural women are significantly under represented on a range of key strategic rural development organisations.

8.17 Men are under represented on the staff of RDC, RCN and the RSNs.

8.18 The main types of information source for women's groups are newsletters, websites, magazines, leaflets, local newspapers and word of mouth and the main information sources are local newspapers, NICVA, RCN, RSNs, Rural Women's Networks, regional and headquarter voluntary/church/youth/sport organisations and local Councils.

8.19 Most of the community development and enterprise development support offered is generic rather than targeting rural women's groups in particular.

8.20 The key skills on management committees of rural women's groups are financial, organisational, communication, planning and management, committee, leadership and interpersonal skills. There is not a significant skills gap on current management committees. Additional skills required are mainly around finance, funding/fundraising, PR and computer skills.

8.21 Structural and organisational culture barriers are more significant factors than skills gaps in the lower representation of women in political and public bodies. Key skills of women in political positions and public bodies are communication skills, public speaking and presentations skills, questioning and critiquing skills and specific skills to ensure the views and opinions of women are heard, valued and influential in a male dominated environment. In addition to skills, confidence and experience, knowledge and awareness of rural community development, public bodies and policy are also important.

8.22 Men in political positions/public bodies and on Boards of key rural development organisations need greater awareness of gender issues and community development and there are skills gaps around creating inclusive meetings.

9 Recommendations

As a result of the baseline study it is proposed that the following recommendations are presented to the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development:

DARD Gender Strategy Partnership for Rural Development

9.1 As part of its Gender Equality Strategy, DARD should take the lead in establishing a gender balanced partnership, involving the main regional rural development stakeholders (DARD, RCN and RDC) along with NIRWN, to develop a long term strategy for women in rural development in Northern Ireland.

This should include:

1) a strategy and time related action plan for redressing gender imbalance in all rural development organisations

2) a strategy for removing organisational culture and structural barriers to the equal participation of women and men in all rural development organisations including gender awareness training, transport and childcare support and changing the timing and location of meetings to ensure full participation.

3) a long term strategy for sustaining regional and sub regional support and local rural women's infrastructure, taking opportunities arising from the Review of Public Administration and the wider review of community/voluntary sector infrastructure

4) the development of a Mentoring Support Initiative to support rural women applying to and participating on Boards and public bodies

5) targeted support for initiatives that increase women's involvement in farming issues, business development and social economy projects

Rural Women's Groups Strategy Partnership

9.2 The main regional rural women's stakeholders (including NIRWN, Rural Women's Networks, WI, Church, Youth, Voluntary and Sports Bodies), led by NIRWN, should work in partnership, to develop a shared vision for working together for the benefit of all rural women to develop a strategy that will:

1) Increase the connections, awareness, networking and collaboration between rural women's infrastructures within Protestant and Catholic communities.

2) Develop rural women's groups' role in 'bridging social capital' between the two communities in rural Northern Ireland and contribution to building a Shared Future in rural communities.

3) Increase the participation of young women in rural women's groups.

4) Increase rural women's representation as elected representatives.

5) Increase the number of women's groups addressing ethnic minority, domestic violence, sexual orientation and supporting women to engage in politics.

6) Increase the participation of women who are divorced or separated, who are neither Protestant nor Catholic, who are from an ethnic minority group, who are lesbian or who have a disability, in rural women's groups.

7) Develop women's skills required in finance, funding/fundraising, PR and computer skills.

8) Engage women and men together in gender awareness training

9) Explore partnership models of rural women working together in other countries

10) Implement a Mentoring Support Initiative to support rural women applying to and participating on Boards and public bodies.

11) Support and advise NIRWN as it works in partnership with the main regional rural development stakeholders to develop a long term strategy for women in rural development in Northern Ireland.

Rural Community Network

9.3 RCN should promote and monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

9.4 RCN should, in partnership with the other relevant stakeholders, examine, develop and promote a holistic approach to gender in rural community development.

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Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland: www.grandorange.org.uk

Methodist Women of Ireland: www.irishmethodist.org/serve/mwi/index.htm

Mothers Union: www.mothersunion.ie

Mothers Union Armagh Diocese: www.armagh.anglican.org/mothersunion.html

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NI Women's Forum: www.womensforumni.co.uk

NIWPGL, an association of lady bowlers affiliated to the Irish Women's Bowling Association (IWBA): www.niwpgl.co.uk

Newry & Mourne Women: www.newryandmournewomen.org

Presbyterian Women's Association:www.presbyterianireland.org/boards/pwa.html

Rural Community Network: www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org

SARWN: www.sarwn.org

Ulster Hockey: www.hockeyulster.org

Women's Institute: www.wini.org.uk

Women's Support Network: www.womenssupportnetwork.org

WRDA: www.wrda.net

YouthNet: www.youthnetni.org.uk

Appendix I

15th February 2007

Dear

Re: Research Advisory Group: Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure

I am writing to invite you to participate in the Research Advisory Group for a Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

The research is part of the Women's Sectoral Programme of the Rural Community Network and the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium.

The purpose of the research is *'to provide a picture of the current rural women's infrastructure, their representation in rural community activity and decision making, the level of rural community activity for rural women and the level of community development skills within the women's sector.'*

RCN has appointed Macaulay Associates to carry out the research. The researchers are Bernie Laverty and Tony Macaulay.

The Research Advisory Group will play a key role in advising on the research. This will include:

- Sharing knowledge and information on rural women's groups and organisations to ensure the baseline is thorough and accurate
- Contributing to the exploration of issues emerging from the qualitative aspects of the research
- Discussing and assessing the research findings
- Appraising proposed recommendations that emerge from the research

The main time commitment required will be two meetings:

1. A Mapping Workshop: a meeting at the beginning of the research to begin to map the number, nature and location of rural women's groups and organisations

2. An Interim Findings Workshop: towards the end of the research to test out the findings and to appraise possible recommendations

In addition, the researchers would like to maintain email and phone contact with the members of the Research Advisory Group as the study progresses.

We are very keen to ensure that the research is advised and informed by a range of groups and agencies and so we would be delighted if you, or another representative you may wish to nominate on behalf of your group/agency, could be part of this group.

The first meeting of the Research Advisory Group will be the Mapping Workshop. At this meeting the researchers will also explain the detail of the research methodology.

I would be grateful if you could confirm by email, if you or a representative will be able to participate and which of the following dates would suit you for the first meeting.

- Monday 5th March: 10.30am-1.00pm
- Monday 5th March: 2.00pm – 4.30pm
- Tuesday 6th March: 10.30am-1.00pm
- Tuesday 5th March: 2.00pm – 4.30pm
- Wednesday 7th March: 2.00pm – 4.30pm

The meetings will take place at the Rural Community Network in Cookstown.

I do hope you will be able to be involved in this project and I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely

Michael Hughes
Director

Appendix II

Research Advisory Group

1) Teresa Canavan, Rural Development Council
2) Mary Duggan, Mid Ulster Women's Network / NI Rural Women's Network
3) Siobhan Doherty, NI Rural Women's Network
4) Gareth Harper, Rural Community Network
5) Kathy Higgins, Irish School of Ecumenics
6) Michael Hughes, Rural Community Network
7) Pat Jess, Open University
8) Bernadette McAliskey, STEP, Dungannon
9) Rosaleen Mc Elhone, Rural Community Network
10) Margaret Ward, Women's Resource and Development Agency
11) Rita Wild, Lesbian Advocacy Services

Appendix III

Rural Women's Sector Baseline Research

Research Advisory Group Meeting

Wednesday 7th March 2007

Glenavon House Hotel

AGENDA

2.00pm Welcome and Introductions - Bernie Laverty

2.15pm Research Methodology – Tony Macaulay

2.30pm Mapping Rural Women's Groups and Organisations – Bernie Laverty

- Women in rural communities
- Rural women's groups
- Main categories
- Possible interviewees

4.00pm Next Steps – Tony Macaulay

- Contact
- Date of next meeting – Interim Findings and Options Appraisal Workshop

4.30pm End

Appendix IV

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

The Rural Community Network and the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium have commissioned Macaulay Associates to carry out a Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.
A central part of the research is a survey of rural women's groups and organisations.
We would therefore appreciate you taking a few minutes to complete this short confidential questionnaire.* Please return your completed questionnaire to Libby Lamont, Rural Community Network, 38a, Oldtown St, Cookstown, BT80 8EF or libby@ruralcommunitynetwork.org before 13th June 2007.

One completed questionnaire will be randomly selected and the winning group will receive a Pamper Session, as a token of our appreciation. Thank you for your assistance.

Q1. What is the name of your group?

Q2. What geographical area does your group cover?

Q3. When was your group established?

Q4. What is your group's main purpose?

Q5. What other women's groups/organisations do you work with?

Q6. How many staff do you employ?

Q7. What is the most pressing issue currently facing your group?

Q8. What activities is your group involved in? Please tick the appropriate boxes below

Activity	***Please tick if your group is involved in the activity***
Arts and crafts	
Sports	
Faith development	
Business development	
Providing information	
Cross community work	
Providing adult education and/or training	
Addressing farming issues	
Community development	
Social economy projects	
Providing capacity building and support	
Equality between women and men	
Lobbying and campaigning	
Peace and reconciliation work	
Provision of child care	
Personal development	
Politics	
Addressing domestic violence / refuge provision	
Ethnic minorities work	
Cross border work	
Sexual orientation work	
Social and recreational activities	
Other activities (please specify):	

Q9. What additional activities do you want to develop?

Q10. How many participants/members does your group currently have?

Q11. What is the estimated percentage of your members/participants and management committee from the following groups? Please insert the percentage in the table below.

Group	***Members/Participants %***	***Management Committee %***
16-25 year olds		
26-49 year olds		
Over 50 year olds		
Has children		
Cares for an elderly or disabled person		
Single		
Married / Living with partner		
Divorced/separated		
Widowed		
Perceived Catholic community background		
Perceived Protestant community background		
Perceived neither Catholic or Protestant community background		
Ethnic Minority		
Heterosexual		
Has a disability		

Q12. Do you monitor the level of diversity within your group? Please circle as appropriate

YES NO

Q13. Does your group have links with groups from a different community background? Please circle as appropriate

YES NO

Q14. What are the most important skills on your management committee?

Q15. What additional skills do you need on your management committee?

Q16. What information sources (e.g. newsletters, websites) does your group use on a regular basis?

Q17. What organisations provide your group with support? Please specify the type of support accessed.

Q18. Do you see your group as contributing to rural development? Please circle as

appropriate

YES NO
If you circled YES, how does your group contribute to rural development?

Q19. What was your group's income in the past year?

Q20. How is your group's income generated?

Q21. In the past three years did your group's income?

INCREASE DECREASE STAY THE SAME

Please circle as appropriate

Q22. In the next three years is your group's funding?

SECURE NOT SECURE

Please circle as appropriate

Q23. What is the impact of the current funding situation on your group?

Q24. Are there any other comments you would like to contribute to the research?

Thank you for your assistance. The research findings will be available from RCN and on the RCN website in July 2007.

Appendix V

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

RCN/RDC/RSN Women Board Members

Interview Questions

1. How do you see the current level of representation of women in key rural development organisations?

2. What are the barriers to representation of women in key rural development organisations?

3. What are the opportunities for representation of women in key rural development organisations?

4. What skills do women have/need to participate at decision making level within the key rural development organisations? Are there skills gaps? If so, how can these be addressed?

5. How did you become a member of your Board?

6. What are your experiences as a woman on your Board?

7. What are the particular issues relating to being a woman on the Board of a key rural development organisation?

8. To what extent do measures need to be taken to address these issues?

9. Have you any other comments you would like to feed into the research?

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

Women on Public/Political Bodies Semi Structured Interview Questions

1. How did you come to take up your position?

2. What were the supports and barriers you experienced in taking up your post?

3. How do you see the level of representation of rural women on public bodies, key rural development organisations and political bodies?

4. What are the supports and barriers for rural women in relation to community representation?

5. What measures need to be taken to address these barriers?

6. What, if any, particular skills do you think rural women need to be effective representatives on public / political bodies?

7. How can women develop the capacity and skills required for participating on a public / political body?

8. What do you see as the role of rural women's groups and organisations in rural development?

9. Have you any other comments you would like to feed into the research?

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

Support Agencies Semi Structured Interview

Questions

1. What type of support and/or information does your organisation provide?

2. What do you see as the main support and information needs of rural women's groups/organisations?

3. What particular support do you offer, that specifically targets rural women's groups/organisations?

4. What, if any, gaps do you see in support available to rural women's groups/organisations?

5. In the past year, which rural women's groups/organisations have accessed support from your organisation?

6. What are the challenges in relation to providing support and information to rural women's groups/organisations for?

   (a) support agencies

   (b) rural women's groups/organisations

7. Have you any other comments you would like to feed into this research?

Appendix VI

List of Interviewees

1) Caroline Breakey, Chairperson, Rural Development Council
2) Maggie Bryson, Cookstown Local Strategy Partnership
3) Anne Carr, former Councillor, Women's Coalition, Down District Council
4) Kate Clifford, Rural College and Board of RCN
5) Fionnuala Cook, Chair, Southern Health & Social Services Board
6) Noelle Donnell, Strabane District Policing Partnership
7) Roberta Dunlop, Councillor, UUP, North Down Borough Council
8) Karin Eyben, Policy Officer, NI Rural Women's Network
9) Danielle Gillespie, Fermanagh Enterprise Agency
10) Ciaran Higgins, Cookstown Enterprise Centre
11) Kathy Higgins, Women in Peacebuilding Programme, Irish School of Ecumenics
12) Mary Hogg, Manager, Positive Steps Community Centre
13) Libby Keys, Board of RCN
14) Ruth McAreavey, Board Member, Rural Development Council
15) Deirdre McBride, NI Policing Board
16) Jennifer McCann, MLA, Sinn Fein
17) Ann McGlone, Board of Governors, East Tyrone Campus
18) Karen McIlvenna, Research Officer, Women's Empowerment Initiative, Cookstown & District Women's Group
19) Majella Murphy, NIRWN and Board Member of South Armagh Rural Women's Network
20) Julie Welsh, Community Development Manager, Coleraine Borough Council

Appendix VII

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

RCN/RDC/RSN Women Board Members

Focus Group Questions

1. How do you see the current level of representation of women in key rural development organisations?

2. What are the barriers to representation of women in key rural development organisations?

3. What are the opportunities for representation of women in key rural development organisations?

4. What skills do women have/need to participate at decision making level within the key rural development organisations? Are there skills gaps? If so, how can these be addressed?

5. How did you become a member of your Board?

6. What are your experiences as a woman on your Board?

7. What are the particular issues relating to being a woman on the Board of a key rural development organisation?

8. To what extent do measures need to be taken to address these issues?

9. Have you any other comments you would like to feed into the research?

16th March 2007

Dear

Re: Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure: Focus Group 28th March

I am writing to invite you to participate in a Focus Group as part of the Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

The research is part of the Women's Sectoral Programme of the Rural Community Network and the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium.

The purpose of the research is *'to provide a picture of the current rural women's infrastructure, their representation in rural community activity and decision making, the level of rural community activity for rural women and the level of community development skills within the women's sector.'*

RCN has appointed Macaulay Associates to carry out the research. The researchers are Bernie Laverty and Tony Macaulay.

As part of the research is exploring rural women and community representation, the researchers are keen to consult with women who are members of the Boards of RCN, RDC and the Rural Support Networks.

The Focus Group of Women Board Members will take place in RCN, Oldtown St, Cookstown on Wednesday 28th March from 7.30pm – 9.30pm. Costs of travel and childcare/eldercare will be reimbursed.

We are very keen to ensure that the research is advised and informed by a range of perspectives and experiences and so we would be delighted if you could be part of this focus group.

I would be grateful if you could confirm with Libby by phone or email libby@ruralcommunitynetwork.org if you are able to participate.

Yours sincerely

Michael Hughes
Director

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

Regional Focus Group– Leaders of Rural Women's Groups and Organisations

Questions

1. How do you see the current infrastructure of rural women's groups and organisations in Northern Ireland?

2. What are the strengths? What are the gaps?

3. What is the range of activities being carried out by rural women's groups and organisations?

4. What measures should be taken to address any gaps in project activities?

5. What are the resource issues for rural women's groups and organisations?

6. What information and support do rural women's groups and organisations currently access?

7. What measures should be taken to address any information or support gaps?

8. How much diversity is there within women's groups and organisations? (e.g. religion, political, sexual orientation, migrant workers, disability etc)

9. What are the barriers and challenges in relation to diversity?

10. How are women's groups and organisations contributing to building a shared future across the sectarian divide in rural communities?

11. How do you see rural women and community representation on key rural development organisations and public bodies?

12. What are the key skills and capacities needed to enable representation of rural women on such bodies?

13. What measures should be taken to address any skills gap or barriers to representation of rural women on such bodies?

14. Have you any other comments you would like to feed into the research?

8th May 2007

Dear

Re: Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure: Focus Group 22nd May

I am writing to invite you, or a rural representative of your group, to participate in a Focus Group as part of the Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

The research is part of the Women's Sectoral Programme of the Rural Community Network and the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium.

The purpose of the research is *'to provide a picture of the current rural women's infrastructure, their representation in rural community activity and decision making, the level of rural community activity for rural women and the level of community development skills within the women's sector.'*

RCN has appointed Macaulay Associates to carry out the research. The researchers are Bernie Laverty and Tony Macaulay.

As part of the research they are keen to consult with leaders of a wide range of women's groups in rural areas.

The Focus Group will take place in RCN, Oldtown St, Cookstown on Tuesday 22nd May from 10.00am -12.30pm. Costs of travel and childcare/eldercare will be reimbursed.

We are very keen to ensure that the research is advised and informed by a range of perspectives and experiences and so we would be delighted if you could be part of this focus group.

I would be grateful if you could confirm with Libby by phone or email libby@ruralcommunitynetwork.org if you are able to participate.

Yours sincerely

Michael Hughes
Director

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

Local Focus Group - Participants

Questions

1. Can you tell us about your group and what it does?

2. How did you become involved in the group?

3. What other community or voluntary groups are you involved in?

4. What made it easy or difficult for you to become actively involved in the group?

5. What are the opportunities for you to become more involved in leadership within your group or wider community? What are the barriers?

6. To what extent have you engaged with women who are different from you, through this group?

7. What, if any new skills would you need to become involved in leadership?

8. How do you see women's current involvement in leadership in rural communities?

9. What are the most important issues for your group over the next three years?

10. Have you any other comments you would like to feed into the research?

Appendix VIII

Board Members Focus Group

1) Elizabeth McCloskey, Board Member, Oakleaf Rural Community Network
2) Monica Coyle, Board Member, RDC, Omagh Women's Area Network and Chair of Omagh Forum for Community Associations

Leaders Focus Group

1) Mabel Campbell, Girls Brigade
2) Siobhan Doherty, NIRWN
3) Maureen Edgar, Methodist Women of Ireland
4) Isobel Loughran, Women into Politics
5) Valerie Stewart, Presbyterian Women's Association
6) Sheena Tally, Ladies Gaelic Football Association

Local Participants Focus Group

1) Sarika Singh, Positive Steps
2) Irene Bell, Tyrone Ladies Groups & PWA
3) Betty Spiers, Derryloran Mothers Union
4) Carol McElmurry, Pomeroy Resource Group
5) Lucia Kearney, MUST Hostel
6) Lori McVay, Queens University
7) Oksana Januitiene, Dungannon Resource Group
8) Elsie Clarke, Traad & Ballyronan Women's Group
9) Margaret Booth, Woodschapel Crèche & Mothers Union
10) Helen Andrews, Loup Women's Group
11) Florence Ferry, PSNI
12) Lorraine Hayes, Positive Steps
13) Tanya Black, Precious Parents Group & Phoenix Parents Council

Appendix IX

Rural Women's Infrastructure Baseline Research

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

The Rural Community Network and the Rural Women's Sectoral Programme Consortium have commissioned a Baseline Study on Rural Women's Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

The research includes an identification of the level of community development support and enterprise development support available to rural women's groups. We would therefore appreciate you taking a few minutes to complete this short confidential questionnaire.

Please return your completed questionnaire to Libby Lamont, Rural Community Network, 38a, Oldtown St, Cookstown, BT80 8EF or libby@ruralcommunitynetwork.org before 30th April 2007.

Thank you for your assistance.

Q1. What is the name of your organisation?

Q2. What geographical area does your organisation cover?

Q3. What type of support and/or information does your organisation provide?

Q4. What do you see as the main support and information needs of rural women's groups/organisations?

Q5. What, if any, support do you offer, that specifically targets rural women's groups/organisations?

Q6. What, if any, gaps do you see in support available to rural women's groups/organisations?

Q7. In the past year, which rural women's groups/organisations have accessed support from your organisation?

Q8. What are the challenges in relation to providing support and information to rural women's groups/organisations for?

(a) support agencies

(b) rural women's groups/organisations

Thank you for your assistance. The research findings will be available from RCN in July 2007.

Thanks

The researchers would like to thank all of those who participated so generously in the research.

Thanks to the Advisory Group Members, participants in the focus groups, interviewees, all those groups and organisations who provided lists of groups and who distributed or advertised the questionnaires and all those groups who took the time to complete the surveys.

Thanks also to the RCN staff team and to Libby Lamont a special thanks for all the hard work on databases and the survey.