

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

In response to the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development's published Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) NIRWN have put together a summary of the impact of the Rural Development Programme on rural women, acknowledging the multiple barriers women face within rural communities. The Rural Development Programme 2007-13 and the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) were both informed by various consultations, of which NIRWN submitted responses based on two consultations held with women in Cookstown and Markethill.

Firstly we would like to thank the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) for publishing the EQIA report and giving the community and voluntary sector an opportunity to see first hand how consultations and input from rural communities shape and direct public policy in a way that acknowledges and assesses the possible impacts to rural citizens. This type of feedback is crucial for the communities and the voluntary sector to feel part of the policy-making process. Furthermore we welcome a document that provides a clear summary of the RDP's wider appeal and potential for rural communities, we found this document easy to read and understand.

Also we would like to thank those rural women who took part in the NIRWN consultations. You have enabled us to communicate your perspectives on the Programme and the key issues coming out of the programme to DARD.

This summary aims to indicate where NIRWN's response, and the responses of rural women have shaped and been acknowledged by strategic level policy-makers within DARD. The previous response from NIRWN is contained within the EQIA document and is available to download from the DARD website www.dardni.gov.uk.

Many of the perspectives and issues pertaining to women have been acknowledged within the document, and NIRWN are satisfied that key issues are outlined within the document, giving assurances that DARD consult and take positive steps to ensure the impact of the Rural Development programme on rural women and other Section 75 groupings allows for the promotion of opportunity and equality for all rural citizens.

The EQIA firstly gives a summary of the Four Axis of section within the Rural Development Programme. This outlines the four main objectives of the programme, they are:

1. Improve the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector
2. Improve the environment and the countryside
3. Improve the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.
4. Implement the above using local community-level delivery systems through Local Action Groups.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires DARD to promote equality of opportunity between the following nine groups:

- Persons of different religious beliefs
- Persons of different political opinions
- Persons of different racial groups
- Persons of different ages
- Persons of different marital status
- Persons of different sexual orientation
- Men and women generally
- Persons with a disability and persons without
- Persons with dependants and persons without.

This consultation paper is an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), to explore the impact the RDP may have on all the above equality groups, in compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The EQIA will also raise awareness of the RDP, and identify likely equality issues and impacts. It will also explore the potential of the RDP to enhance equality of opportunity and ways of dealing with any possible equality imbalance.

The document then indicates how each objective can be successfully achieved whilst ensuring equality of opportunity and potential impact on the nine Section 75 groups. Women often have multiple inequality issues cross-cutting over other sections, for example, women living with disability, gay, lesbian or bi-sexual women, old women, ethnic minority women, and women of different religious beliefs. Therefore the previous response from NIRWN ensured that this multiplicity of women was acknowledged.

The current RDP will target women and support activities within both agriculture and rural development. The role of women in farm business' was acknowledged and opportunities to avail both of training and entrepreneurial enterprises was a commitment within Axis 1. The inequality of the gender pay gap was acknowledged and thus we assume the current RDP will favour projects that show a commitment both to the Gender Equality Strategy and the Anti-Poverty Strategy. We look forward to seeing both the Male and Female Gender Strategy Action Plans in relation to more measurable targets.

Childcare and lack of representation were two key issues that DARD acknowledged within the report, and LAG's were identified as a means to breaking down the barriers of representation. We support increased representation

and inclusion of women within the decision-making processes and the administration of the programme so that projects are understood in relation to the real benefits and impacts for rural women.

We welcome the Departments commitment to the lack of provision of childcare as a key barrier to rural women in terms of employment and training. NIRWN welcomes DARDs promotion of the RDP as a means to alleviate some of the pressure and the longitudinal approach of the Department in relation to a Rural Childcare Strategy will support the elimination of discrimination against women in rural areas. We strongly feel this will require a cross-departmental approach, and as identified by the EQIA report the commitment of Public Expenditure money to Childcare and Transport is a key determinant in the opportunities rural women have to be a part of and contribute to rural community life.

The Department realises the limitations to change the realities of farm ownership, and we welcome the Departments commitment and promotion for the acknowledgement of women as a core asset and 'backbone' of many farm business'. We urge the department to continue this promotion and highlight the integral role that women of all ethnicities and religious backgrounds play within the agricultural industry. It is NIRWN's hope that continued promotion will assist in the increased opportunity of womens participation both within the labour market and importantly within decision-making and policy-making. In relation to this last point we endorse and support the Departments' commitment to ensuring there is a good equality balance on LAGs. NIRWN genuinely feels this is a vital component in ensuring equality continues beyond the EQIA and into implementation and delivery of the programme.

We encourage DARD to continue consulting with rural communities, organisations, networks and agencies to ensure the EQIA and commitments that will be made within DARDs Gender Equality Action Plans continue to address and act as positive action in the elimination of inequality and discrimination rural women face. NIRWN will remain committed to ensuring the voices of rural women are heard throughout the course of the RDP 2007-2013 and we hope the current programme will bring equal opportunity, prosperity and vibrancy to rural communities in Northern Ireland.

NIRWN represent rural women on the DARD Equality Steering Group and on the DARD Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme Monitoring Committee. We see this as key to ensuring that rural women are fully represented and we thank DARD for welcoming us on to both of these key committees.

Equality Roadshows

Tuesday 9 October 2007

Lodge Hotel, 3.00pm-5.00pm

Lodge Road, Coleraine 6.00pm-8.00pm

Wednesday 10 October 2007

CAFRE Campus

Dungannon Road, 3.00pm-5.00pm

Cookstown 6.00pm-8.00pm

Thursday 11 October 2007

Loughs Agency 3.00pm-5.00pm

22 Victoria Road, Derry 6.00pm-8.00pm

For further information please contact DARD's Rural Development Division, Dundonald House, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast.
Tel: 028 9052 4347

If you feel that any inequalities and impacts of the RDP still remain please get in contact either with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development or NIRWN who work to support and amplify the voice of all women in rural communities.

- ◆ Do you feel the Departments commitment to and assessments of the impacts of the Rural Development Programme reflect the real barriers and issues that older women face in rural communities?
- ◆ Do you feel there are other groups outside of the Section 75 Categories that require specific acknowledgement in relation to rural affairs and the RDP?
- ◆ Do you agree with DARD that many of the gender inequality issues will be rectified through increased gender equality within LAGs?
- ◆ Do you feel the commitment of DARD in relation to administrative assistance and advice, training and re-skilling could benefit women in relation to Axis 1?
- ◆ Do you agree with DARD that the measures contained within Axis 2 do not require any specific equality screening?
- ◆ Do you feel the measures and the EQIA report address the inequality experienced by certain groups in relation to services and information in rural areas?

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