



**nirwn**  
Northern Ireland  
Rural Women's Network

**NIRWN Consultation Response to  
Dept of Agriculture and Rural  
Development Proposals for the six  
EU Priorities for Rural  
Development Programme 2014 -  
2020**

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## **Introduction**

NIRWN's vision is a rural community where women are respected and valued and where they have the opportunities, confidence and ability to visibly take up positions of power and influence in all areas of life.

NIRWN key objectives:

- 1 Increasing the voice of rural women through giving them a voice at Policy level
- 2 Playing an advocacy and lobbying role on behalf of rural women
- 3 Encouraging women in decision-making and providing representation for rural women
- 4 Information and networking opportunities for rural women
- 5 Working within the Regional Support for Women in Disadvantaged and Rural Areas Programme, funded by DSD and DARD to give a voice to rural women

## **Mission**

NIRWN's mission, as a rural regional support organisation, is to advance rural women's equality and participation in society. We will ensure rural women are recognised and supported to fully participate as equal citizens in the development of sustainable rural communities and society.

## **Consultation Process**

NIRWN participated in the 6 DARD consultation exercises across Northern Ireland, to gather the views of the rural community on the new programme with a particular focus on women's issues. The organisation also undertook extensive desktop research into the programmes and support for women's groups in NI. NIRWN would have liked to have referred to the research into Women and the Rural Development Programme undertaken by Dr Sally Shorthall and Roisin Kelly, however as the final document has at time of submission not been published we have referred to the synopsis which has been presented.

The comments and recommendations below, reflect the consultation exercise which has been completed and is submitted on behalf of the organisation.

### **General feedback**

The programme needs to account for the role and participation of women more clearly through greater levels of recording through the Section 75 feedback sheets. The current take up of this is low and therefore it is difficult for organisations to accurately reflect the needs of women in the RDP. This is applicable to all sections of the community and not just a gender issue.

It is also recognised by research that the rural women's sector has not been funded in line with their urban counterparts. Rural women's groups only received 1.3% of the total funding allocated to all women's groups in NI in the period 2008-2011 (DSD/ OFMDFM research) and as they are categorised as rural there is an understanding that it will be provided for under the RDP. However the funding needs of the rural women's sector is for revenue costs to subsidise programmes and this is not eligible in the current RDP.

### **Recommendations:**

- Make it a requirement for participation/ support in RDP projects to complete a Section 75 form.

Allow funding for revenue costs of the social enterprise sector.

### **Comments:**

Considering the barriers of off-farm employment and seasonal demands on active male members of the farming community the target beneficiary should be better extended to farmers and their dependents, which would allow integration of spouses, children etc.

The role and capacity of women to participate in this priority is not emphasised – however they may have a greater potential to participate and make a stronger contribution to growing the business.

Area 1A which aims to foster innovation and the knowledge base in rural areas, does not need to be restrictive to the farming industry. As a cross cutting theme, it would demonstrate the relevance of this priority by including an action which looks to fostering innovation and increase in knowledge in rural life and in the skills of all rural dwellers and not exclusively the farm family.

Peer to peer training is regarded as an excellent approach and this is being adopted for the On-farm training but this could be extended to all types of training in rural areas so that areas/groups can learn from best practice in other topics such as social entrepreneurship.

Training should be open to everyone in the farming community and not limited to those farms that support at least 0.5 full time equivalents, therefore assisting the small emerging farm which may be specialist in nature or a diversification from their core farm business.

Area 2B which aims to support generation renewal in the agricultural sector does not deal with the assumption that succession will be male family members, whereas in the modern paradigm it may just as likely be a female family member who succeeds the business<sup>1</sup>. This is a cultural shift which will require innovative thinking by farm owners and should therefore be supported in this priority.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1 Adoption of the EIP operational group model to all areas of rural knowledge and promotion of innovation to approaches to rural living such as childcare, health and education and support for isolated rural dwellers.
- 2 Focus on women in training and their role on the farm and not just on young farmers.
- 3 Training should look at all rural life and not be exclusive for farming community.
- 4 Innovative approaches to succession planning and the sharing of this knowledge is necessary to tackle the gender inequalities in how land is transferred between the generations.

### **Comments:**

Thus the target beneficiaries for this proposal are (1) young farmers (under 40) entering the industry and (2) active farm business owners.

As in Priority 1, the role and capacity of women to participate is not emphasised – even though they may have a greater potential to participate and make a stronger contribution to growing the business. In many farming households spouses and daughters administer the business functions of accounting, VAT returns, income tax returns etc, and also have an active hands-on role in delivering the farm business.

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There is a need to ensure that the business development groups have a structure and theme around realistic business growth and whether this can be extended to rural business hubs in general.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1 As it has been noted that the majority of the farm's financial affairs are managed by a female farm family member, the business groups need to be cognisant of the gender makeup of the group and allow for the member's needs.
- 2 As benchmarking is a priority, the groups should not be producer focused and look at the business of the farm; therefore it is recommended that meetings are not always on the farm and the training environment should allow for learning on the necessary business skills required for managing the farm business as well as production.

### **Comments**

There is no indication of how many farming dependents are involved in the agri-food sector, including both young people and women. However, with the target beneficiary being micro food businesses, food SMEs and agri-food industry leaders this priority will support rural women involved in the sector. The proposed schemes will positively impact rural women entrepreneurs. The role and contribution of women in this sector should therefore be acknowledged and reflected in the proposed actions.

This priority requires investment to develop networks and experience, and an integrating role for Invest NI as well as the local business networks. This programme should include rural food businesses which are not necessarily located on the farm and employ a larger percentage of women.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1 As in the support for young farmers, there should be an emphasis on women in this priority to reflect the high level of female involvement in the agri-food production sector.
- 2 Need to reflect that not all agri-food producers/ businesses are farm based due to lack of facilities, therefore support should be product focused rather than location focused.

### **Comments:**

NIRWN supports the environmental sustainability of the agriculture and forestry industries and feels that this priority is beyond their remit.

### **Comments:**

Whilst Priorities 1-5 are firmly focused on farming, Priority 6 should be firmly focused on addressing exclusion, poverty and economic underdevelopment within the large population of the rural population not connected to farming.

There is a need to promote and encourage the sustainability of rural areas and the maintenance of a viable rural population and the key basic services required, indicating that modern services and infrastructure *should* reverse trends of social and economic decline and lead to inclusion, economic growth and viability.

There is a recognition for a need for synergy with other EU funds and this is supported. There is a need for innovation for departments to collaborate so that the urban/rural divide is not exacerbated but policies are harmonised as there is a mutual reliance between these different communities.

The continued 'Leader' approach would suggest that membership of LAGs in the future should be more representative of rural society, which is important in terms of succession planning and development of new rural leaders in the interests of diversity. The LAGs show a higher participation of women in these groups and this should be developed into other areas of the RDP and not solely on the community aspects of the programme.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1 Need to reflect on the lessons learned in the previous programmes and integrate these lessons into the new programme
- 2 To extend the LEADER approach to other priorities to bring diversity into the planning and decision making process in how programmes are delivered.
- 3 To build on the capacity building of the previous programmes e.g. a great deal of investment into rural infrastructure and buildings in the previous programme and now a need to support the development of the social entrepreneurs who will manage these facilities to make them sustainable. Need to look at funding of revenue costs to establish new innovative social enterprises.
- 4 Need for greater investment in rural women's groups to give them parity of esteem with their urban counterparts and to provide the necessary services rural women need to achieve their full economic and social potential.

