

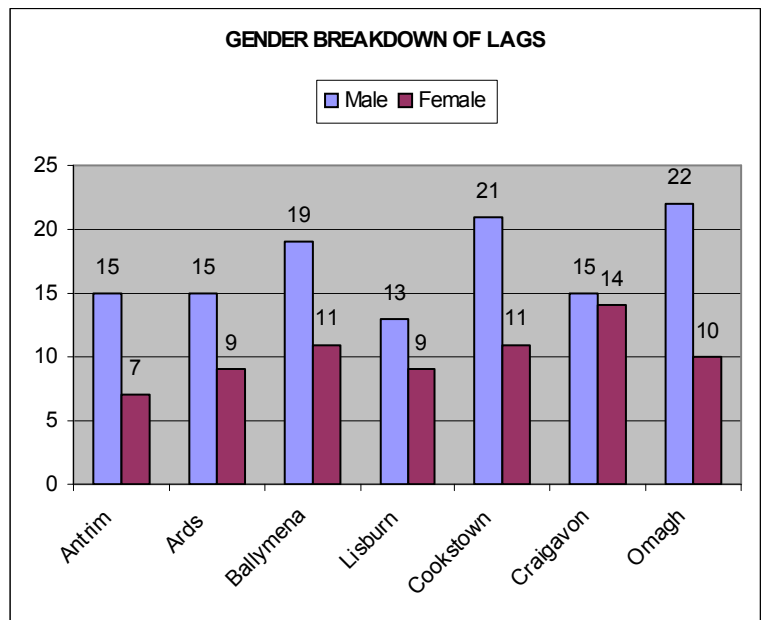
RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Since the first edition of our Policy Bulletin was issued, we have seen the establishment of 7 Local Action Groups (LAGs). LAGs consist of a mix of Councillors and Social partners. LAGs were set up to distribute Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme, worth approximately £100 million. Axis 3 centres on improving the quality of life in rural areas and diversifying the rural economy. The 7 LAGs will be responsible for developing tailored strategies and programmes for their local areas. NIRWN has encouraged as many rural women as possible to take up positions on LAGs, to ensure that women are appropriately represented. The table below illustrates the gender breakdown of LAGs. We can see from the diagram that some LAGs have achieved a more balanced representation than others. The Council of Europe recommends a minimum representation of 40%; only 2 of the LAGs have achieved this target. Over the coming months, we will be holding a number of information sessions in each of the LAG areas to enable rural women to find out further information on RDP funding. Details of the dates and locations of events will be published on the NIRWN website and through our Newsletter in due course. Watch this space!!

Under Axis 3 there are 6 measures:

1. Diversification into Non-agricultural Activities
2. Support for Business Creation and Development
3. Encouragement of Tourism Activities
4. Basic Services for the Economy and Rural Population
5. Village Renewal and Development
6. Conservation and Upgrading the Rural Heritage

5% of the Rural Development budget has also been ringfenced for projects centering on children and young people. Given that childcare has been an important issue for rural women, this funding may provide much needed opportunities to overcome childcare needs in rural areas.



RURAL WOMEN'S POLICY FORUM MEETING - MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

Policy is not a word that is used in everyday vocabulary. However government policy plays a huge role and impacts greatly on what we do, and have access to, in our rural daily lives. The Rural Women's Policy Forum was formed to allow the rural women's sector to consider policy issues on health, well-being, education, training, social exclusion, childcare and other key services and issues. It does exactly what it says on the tin, it considers policy from a rural woman's angle. The purpose of the RWPF is to de-mystify policy and to consider the potential implications for rural women. We want to ensure that the RWPF is as representative as possible. Therefore if you would like your group to be represented, or do not belong to a rural women's group but are interested in attending, please contact our Policy Officer.

The meeting will be held in the Community Relations Council, Moygashel, Dungannon from 10.30am to approx 1.15pm. The Head of Policy with DARD will be present at the meeting to outline the concept of the Rural Champion role. (Lunch will be provided). Details of the meeting and agenda are available on the NIRWN website. Alternatively please contact our Policy Officer, Nora Smith on 02886769191 or email nora@nirwn.org.uk

RURAL CHAMPION

The Department of Agricultural and Rural Development has recently announced a consultation on the proposed Rural Champion concept and the enhancement of the rural proofing process. In the consultation document DARD stated:

“Rural Champion is about developing tools and mechanisms that ensure that the issues affecting rural communities can be presented to, discussed with and acted upon by a range of policy makers. It is about defining an approach, and putting in place new ways of working, that helps connect rural communities to policies affecting rural areas”.

NIRWN will be developing a comprehensive response, in consultation with rural women's groups. If you would like to play an active role in this response, we plan to hold a number of focus groups to gauge firsthand your views on this important debate. If you would like to participate in a discussion about the role of the Rural Champion, or indeed would like more information on the consultation, please contact our Policy Officer, Nora Smith to discuss further.

DARD DIRECT EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

DARD are currently carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment on its proposals to improve customer services, through the equitable access of all DARD's main farmer focussed services. They are rationalising the current network of 31 offices to 10 offices. We will use this opportunity to highlight that one of the key issues for farming rural women, is the lack of opportunity to have formal recognition for their contribution to family businesses and farms. The inequality for farm women in Northern Ireland is that of invisibility. Agricultural census reporting has not allowed the reporting of more than one principal partner. This meant that, in the last census, 35 per cent of women who were working more than 30 hours a week on their farms were classified only as 'farmer's spouses' (Shortall and Kelly, 2001). This skewed statistic neglects the information needs of farming women. Even though farming is primarily a family business, the male primary producer is the only recipient and user of information and services relating to primary production. This emphasis has generally ignored a large customer base. We will be making this comment as part of our response.

BAMFORD REVIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH AND LEARNING DISABILITY

Our primary point in responding to this consultation is to highlight the social exclusion experienced by rural women of all ages, classes and backgrounds. We will encourage the review to recognise that the social exclusion and association to mental health problems is a major concern. We will highlight the need for specific and concerted efforts to promote and support action to overcome the barriers which exist. We will work to ensure the review will enable rural women with mental health problems and/or learning disabilities to be full and active participants enabled and supported to make a valuable contribution to their communities and society. NIRWN strongly believe that this particular focus is required given the social exclusion experienced by rural women. Social exclusion may lead to or exacerbate mental health problems and/or disabilities due to their geographical status. We would suggest this leaves rural women with mental health problems and/or learning disabilities even more vulnerable.

BILL OF RIGHTS EVENT - WEDNESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2008

NIRWN and Omagh Women's Area Network are co-hosting an information event on Wednesday 22 October in The Sliverbirch Hotel in Omagh. The purpose of the event is to raise awareness on the report that was submitted to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) on behalf of the women's sector. The event will provide information on what exactly a Bill of Rights means for Northern Ireland and the potential opportunities to strengthen a rights based approach for rural women. There will be a panel of expert speakers, as well as representation from the NIHRC. We would like to encourage as many rural women to attend the event. For further information and to RSVP please contact our Policy Officer Nora Smith on 028 86769191 or email nora@nirwn.org.uk

Is this Policy Bulletin useful? We welcome any comments that you have on our Policy Update Bulletin. Did you find it useful? Is there any other information that you would like to see included? Please contact us with your feedback. If you would like to be included in our circulation list regarding policy consultations, please contact our Policy Officer, Nora Smith.

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